

OCTOBER 11, 2004

CAN DEMS TAKE THE SENATE?

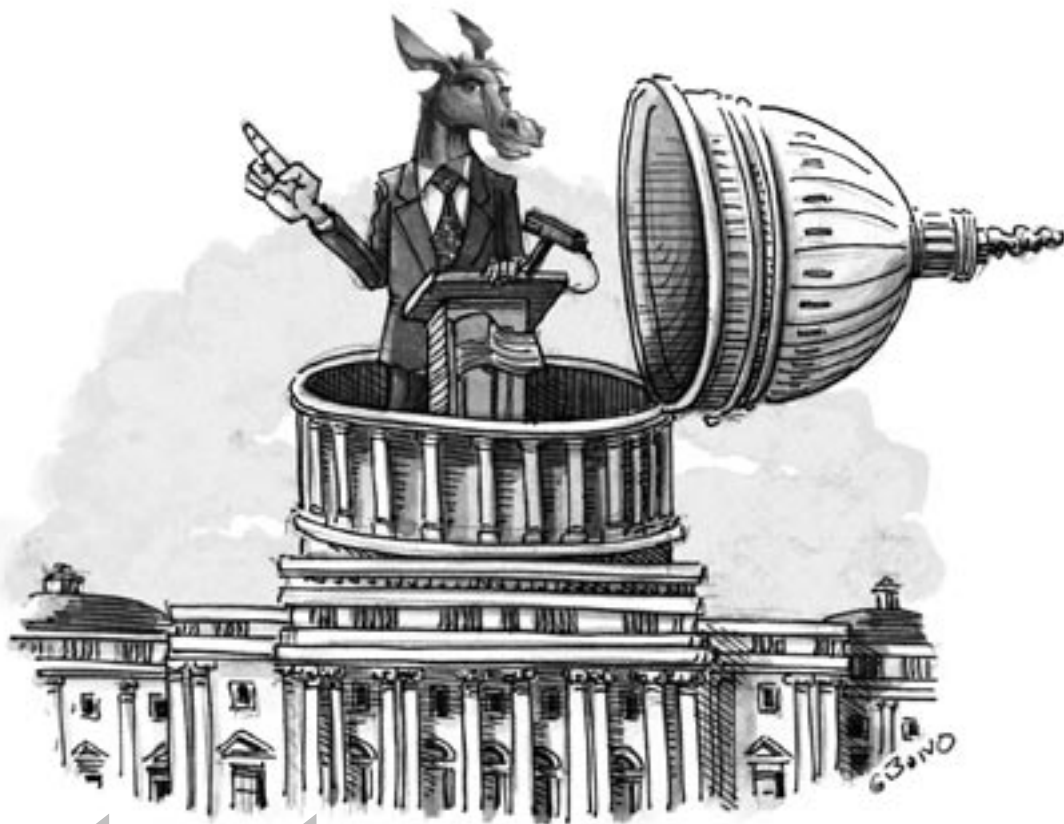
IN THESE TIMES



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“Political propaganda, the art of anchoring the things of the state in the broad masses so that the whole nation will feel a part of them, cannot therefore remain merely a means to the goal of winning power. It must become a means of building and keeping power.”

JOSEPH GOEBBELS, 1934



Editorial

Duck and Cover-up By Joel Bleifuss

The presidential campaign has made one thing clear: The Bush administration employs a strategy of lies and dirty tricks to stay in power.

This is well documented. The administration predicated its war in Iraq on false information. Bush campaign surrogate Swift Boat Veterans for Truth fictionalized Kerry's service in Vietnam. And the Department of Homeland Security seemingly issues terror alerts with every Kerry uptick in the polls.

This venal strategy was at its most blatant when Dick Cheney told a crowd in Des Moines that a Kerry win would inexorably lead to another September 11: "It's absolutely essential that eight weeks from today, on November 2, we make the right choice, because if we make the wrong choice then the danger is that we'll get hit again and we'll be hit in a way that will be devastating from the standpoint of the United States."

Is the GOP actually suggesting that veteran John Kerry will herald the end times, while the lying George Bush is America's savior? Apparently so.

Wayne Slater, Texas journalist and co-author of *Bush's Brain: How Karl Rove Made George W. Bush Presidential*, notes that Rove has built a career on attacking opponents' strengths, not their weaknesses. The Swift Boat campaign against Kerry recalls the Rove strategy against John McCain in 2000. After winning in New Hampshire, McCain tanked in South

Carolina after voters "learned" that his wife was a drug addict, he was unstable and the two had a black child.

Dirty tricks underpin the Bush operation because winning is the only goal. Rove and Co. have internalized the teachings of political philosopher Leo Strauss, who maintained that deception and lies are necessary political tools. Take the administration's response to the 9/11 investigations.

Abdussattar Shaikh, an FBI informant and friend to two 9/11 terrorists, was withheld from investigators despite repeated requests. "The administration would not sanction a staff interview with [Shaikh]. Nor did the administration agree to allow the FBI to serve a subpoena or a notice of deposition on [Shaikh]," the FBI explained in a letter.

In his new book *Intelligence Matters*, task force co-chair Sen. Bob Graham (D-Fla.) writes that this letter was the first time investigators saw in writing what they had long believed. "The White House was directing the cover-up," writes Graham.

So why isn't the media all over this story?

For journalists to admit they were duped over and over by this administration would require that they own up to their professional shortcomings. So that job was left to a self-described "fake news program."

Take this dead-on exchange between "Daily Show" host Jon Stewart and correspondent Rob Corddry over Bush campaign claims about Kerry's military record.

STEWART Here's what puzzles me most, Rob. John Kerry's record in Vietnam is pretty much right there in the official records of the U.S. military and hasn't been disputed for 35 years.

CORDDRY That's right, Jon, and that's certainly the spin you'll be hearing coming from the Kerry campaign over the next few days.

STEWART That's not a spin thing, that's a fact. That's established.

CORDDRY Exactly, Jon, and that established incontrovertible fact is one side of the story.

STEWART But isn't that the end of the story. I mean, you've seen the records, haven't you? What's your opinion?

CORDDRY I'm sorry, my opinion? I don't have opinions. I'm a reporter, Jon, and my job is to spend half the time repeating what one side says, and half the time repeating the other. Little thing called "objectivity"—might want to look it up some day.

STEWART Doesn't objectivity mean objectively weighing the evidence, and calling out what's credible and what isn't?

CORDDRY Whoa-ho! Sounds like someone wants the media to act as a filter! Listen buddy: not my job to stand between the people talking to me and the people listening to me. ■



Now We Know

I must compliment David Sirota and Christy Harvey on their article ("They Knew," August 30). It lays out all the lies that came from the talking heads on TV and the Bush administration. Most of the articles you quote in this are the articles that made me mistrust the Bush administration. By compiling them all in one location, I hope they can be used to expose the lies of our president and his administration.

*Bryan Ulfers
Des Moines, Iowa*

Keep the Faith

I'm a longtime reader of Kurt Vonnegut's books. But his "I Love You, Madam Librarian" in the August 30 issue indicates he is losing faith in the human species.

He shouldn't.

Look at his own examples: librarians and your magazine. There are a lot more people

than you could imagine doing small things to keep the human fabric together, to avoid disrupting it, to keep the memory of things past.

It is our duty to keep bringing the light. Even in the form of a small candle.

*V. Vieira
Porto, Portugal*

Get Back the Vote

Dan Frosch accurately depicts the frightening rate at which states are intimidating poor and minority ex-felons into losing their franchise through a variety of tactics that'd make Strom Thurmond blush ("The Ex Factor," August 30). Even states such as my native New Jersey now ask those registering to vote if they have ever been convicted of a felony, and one must wonder how many potential voters have been scared away by even this not-so-subtle roadblock.

Yet one has to wonder why organizations such as the Western Prison Project haven't brought suit to restore the voting rights of all former felons. After all, the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution clearly states, "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." Granted, Bill Rehnquist and his partners in crime have tortured the meaning of many parts of the Constitution for the last 30 years, but surely a case can be made that former felons' voting rights are constitutionally protected.

*Bob Zecker
Antigonish, Nova Scotia*

Robinson correctly concludes that the truth will be known by detecting changes in the rate of new autism cases, because of the vast reduction in the use of mercury-containing vaccines that began in 1999.

Children born in the years 1999 and 2000 are now entering the California developmental services system, the world's best record-keeping system. The largest reduction of new autism cases in the history of the system just occurred in the quarter April 2004 through June 2004, capping three consecutive quarters of decline. It is the first sustained reduction of new autism cases in the 35-year history of California's system.

This may be the beginning of a decline in the tragic autism epidemic and suggests that parents may have been correct all along in suspecting vaccines of triggering regressive autism in genetically susceptible children.

*Darrell Crain,
Alpine, Calif.*

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DISCUSSION

"Generally this is a very perceptive article by David Moberg. But he continues his tendency to inexplicably suck up to the National Unity Partnership leadership establishment by scribbling not even one word about the crying need for some hint of internal union democracy at the grassroots level."

"Union building in this country has always been grassroots and that's what it needs for its future ... I'm not saying Bush isn't bad for labor, but Kerry isn't the savior of the labor movement ... and the National Unity Party might be.

Join the debate online at "Come Together Right Now."

Counter-Counterpoint

As a health practitioner who works with vaccine-damaged children, I am interested in the ongoing debate regarding the vaccine-autism link. Public health nurse Cheryl Robinson's letter ("Letters," August 9) describes the article "Hawkeyes Eye Mercury" as one-sided, and then proceeds to give the one-sided view promoted by the vaccine industry.

She asserts that study after study has shown no link to exist between autism and vaccines. Not mentioned is the considerable research that does suggest a causal link.

Twisted Logic

In her letter from the August 30 issue ("Simple Formulae"), Mary Clark claims "progressives everywhere need to put down their political theory tracts and think about some simple formulae." Perhaps we should put down those tracts, but apparently Clark needs to pick up a Logic 101 textbook.

As one of those people considering voting for Nader, I am, according to Clark, a closet Bush supporter who is filled with "irresponsible ignorance." Nonetheless, my elementary understanding of logic prods me to point out that Clark's

first formula (not voting for Kerry = voting for Bush) is based upon a logical fallacy: namely, an improper disjunctive syllogism—i.e., something must be P or Q. It is not P, so therefore it is Q.

The use of such a syllogism is only applicable in those rare cases in which we truly face an either-or choice. It is, however, inapplicable in a situation in which we face numerous choices—such as the November election, in which we can vote for Kerry, Nader, David Cobb, write in a candidate, abstain from voting, etc.

Clark's formula would have an element of truth only if we accepted the premise that to vote for Nader is to take away a vote from Kerry, and therefore indirectly assist Bush, his primary rival. Such a premise, however, assumes that Kerry and the Democrats are somehow entitled to the votes of anyone who opposes the Bush administration and the Republicans and what they stand for. Members of the left who have accepted this subservience to the Democratic Party should not feel the compulsion to deride those of us who have the outlandish desire to stay autonomous from a party that has betrayed our causes and values too many times to count.

Daniel Rose
Fairlawn, Ohio

election 2004 coverage

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Relatives pray for a peaceful outcome to the Chechen-Russian showdown.

GRIGORY DUKOR / REUTERS

The Bloodiest Chapter

A recent spate of Chechen terrorist attacks sends a centuries-old conflict spiraling out of control. *By Fred Weir*

MOSCOW—AS RUSSIA'S SUMMER OF TERROR unfolded, it might have been easy to forget the long and agonizing prehistory to the headline-grabbing horrors that included exploding airliners, suicide bombs and schoolchildren taken hostage.

Independence-seeking Chechen fighters, who are behind the recent wave of terrorist attacks, have been a bone in the Kremlin's throat for almost 300 years. And President Vladimir Putin faces the same dilemma that earlier led Czars and communist commissars to seek "solutions" to the Chechen problem as brutal as any in the annals of warfare.

"We have had war with Chechnya for two centuries, and not much has changed," says Konstantin Simonov, with the Centre for Current Politics in Moscow. "This is a 19th Century conflict still going strong in the 21st."

In recent years the conflict has mutated into a savage war of terrorist violence against helpless civilians, one for which Russian security forces appear woefully unprepared.

Terrorist actions have killed more than 1,000 Rus-

sians since the onset of war five years ago, with the death toll spiraling each year.

The attackers have grown bolder, knocking down two airliners, bombing a Moscow metro station and taking 1,200 hostages, mostly children, at a North Ossetian school. The daytime school seizure, the most horrific act yet in a conflict marked by massive criminal excesses on both sides, ended in more than 300 dead, half of them children, when ill-prepared Russian security forces stormed the building after a bomb exploded, apparently by accident.

"Our law enforcement bodies are in decay," says Pavel Felgenhauer, an independent security expert. "So far we've been lucky that the terrorists have launched only random attacks and not a full-scale campaign of terror against us."

An indigenous nation of mountain herdsmen and farmers with their own language and clan-based society, the Chechens have lived in the Caucasus for thousands of years. Russian Czar Peter the Great occupied the Caspian coastline in the 18th Century but

Now a Lost Cause?

There is no respite from grim news in Sudan. United Nations inaction and disingenuousness ensure that diplomatic efforts will fall far short of what is needed to end the brutal and violent attacks on the African tribal peoples in Darfur. And the Bush administration, having squandered its diplomatic capital on the war in Iraq, is unable to lead in New York and is without a clear plan of action in Washington.

Peace talks in Nigeria between Khar-toum and the two Darfur insurgency groups have stalemated. The Sudan Liberation Army and the Justice and Equality Movement, which grew out of years of abuse of the African tribal groups of Darfur, refuse to disarm and confine themselves in various "cantons" specified by Khartoum. They know full well that to concentrate themselves in well-identified geographic locations without weapons would make them easy targets for the regime and its murderous Arab militia, the Janjaweed.

Meanwhile, the violence in Darfur shows signs of escalating. Tens of thousands are poised to flee into Chad, where more than 200,000 refugees already are struggling in terrible conditions. Large influxes of newly displaced persons are being reported in already severely overcrowded camps, where almost 1 million people have sought refuge. Women and girls in the camps remain constant victims of rape, and health conditions are deeply threatening: Untreatable Hepatitis E is spreading uncontrollably; malaria, cholera and dysentery loom as terrible threats.

Agricultural production has come to a halt throughout Darfur, and with the massive destruction of foodstuffs by the Janjaweed, a population of more than 2 million is now food-dependent and will remain so for the foreseeable future. Severe malnutrition continues to rise as the needs of hundreds of thousands go unmet. More than 150,000 already have perished.

Humanitarian intervention remains the only solution to the crisis, but U.N. inaction and U.S. paralysis ensure this will not occur. The catastrophe continues unabated, with no end but mass destruction in sight.

—Eric Reeves

declined to move inland after encountering the ferocious Chechen mountain warriors. Gen. Alexei Yermolov, who led Russian forces in the first years of a ruthless 30-year campaign to conquer the Caucasus region in the 19th Century, called the Chechens "congenital rebels." Novelist Mikhail Lermontov, a Russian officer in that war, wrote in 1832, "[The Chechens'] god is freedom; their law is war."

Yermolov and his successors eventually subdued Chechnya by incinerating its forests to uncover the guerrillas and by executing dozens of Chechen hostages for every Russian soldier lost.

In 1944 Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin accused the Chechens of collaborating with the Nazis, and had the entire nation—half a million people—deported to the wastes of Central Asia. An estimated 150,000 Chechens died during the forced winter march.

"Deportation and the exile that followed united the Chechens, in bitterness, sorrow and rage," says Vladimir Dimitryev, with the Russian Institute of Ethnology. "We are reaping the harvest today."

Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev permitted the Chechens to return to their homes in 1956, and the region settled into its longest period of relative peace in three centuries. But the post-Soviet period may yet prove to be the bloodiest chapter in this seemingly endless conflict.

As the USSR was collapsing in 1991, former Soviet Airforce General Dzhokar Dudayev seized power in the Chechen capital of Grozny and declared independence, claiming that Chechnya had the same right to freedom as other former Soviet captive nations that were being welcomed into the world as new states.

Moscow disagreed, and in December 1994 then-President Boris Yeltsin ordered his forces to invade. Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev assured that "two regiments of paratroopers in two hours" could subdue Chechnya. The war lasted nearly two years, killed upward of 80,000 people, mostly civilians, and ended in humiliating Russian defeat.

But the Chechens proved incapable of governing themselves. Wartime military leader Aslan Maskhadov was elected president in 1997 but quickly lost control to powerful warlords, including legendary Chechen field commander Shamil Basayev.

By the late '90s, Basayev and his allies had abandoned Chechen nationalism and embraced Islamic fundamentalism as their key ideology. Some Chechens took training in Afghan camps run by international terrorists, while funding, expertise and

personnel from groups such as al Qaeda found their way to Basayev.

"The situation changed radically" after the first war, Simonov says. "The Chechen war became internationalized, part of a wider global conflict"

Forces under Basayev invaded neighboring Dagestan in 1999 but were thrown back by Russian troops and local militias. After a series of devastating and still-unexplained apartment bombs killed nearly 300 Russians, a huge Russian army assaulted Chechnya and occupied the entire republic within six months—making Vladimir Putin a national hero and ensuring his landslide victory in March 2000.

But Maskhadov's rebel forces continued to strike back, killing a dozen or more Russian troops each week, and making a mockery of Kremlin declarations that "normalcy" is returning to Chechnya.

Female suicide bombers, recruited and trained by Basayev, have wreaked havoc. These "Black Widows"—so named by Russians because they're typically Chechen women who've lost their husbands to war—have killed hundreds in the Moscow metro, at a rock concert, on busy street corners and by bringing down two Russian airliners.

Until this summer, the worst incident was the seizure by a Chechen suicide squad of a downtown Moscow theatre with 800 hostages in October 2002. That siege ended when elite security troops pumped sleeping gas into the theatre, then charged in and killed the Chechen fighters. The operation was a tactical success, but a political disaster: Nearly 130 hostages died from the gas, prompting a wave of public outrage.

Putin has staked much on an effort to install a pro-Moscow government in the region, in hopes of "Chechenizing" the conflict. But a rebel bomb killed the Kremlin's first man, President Akhmad Kadyrov, last May. A new strongman, Alu Alkhanov, was elected in August to replace him, but the record would seem to hold out little hope.

Chechnya's first leader, Dudayev, was killed by a Russian missile in 1996. His successor, Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, was assassinated by a car bomb set by Russian agents in the Gulf state of Qatar earlier this year. Maskhadov is holed up in the rugged mountains of southern Chechnya and is said to still command widespread support.

Unless the Kremlin decides to finally "solve" its intractable Chechen problem by repeating the genocidal policies of the past, it may yet find there is no other way but to sit down and negotiate with Maskhadov. ■

On the (Re)Bounce

Despite the hype, polls show Kerry still holds lead in electoral vote count. *By Alan Waldman*

OVER THE PAST FORTNIGHT, aided by both a gloves-off Republican Convention and the over-publicized Swift Boat liars attack on Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry, the George W. Bush reelection campaign rebounded in both the popular vote and the electoral vote races.

Since mid-August, Kerry's 7 percent lead in the popular vote reversed into a Bush lead of 1-11 points, depending on the poll. But an ongoing survey of nonpartisan state polls found Kerry's substantial electoral-vote lead (which he steadily maintained since selecting John Edwards as his running mate in early July) plunged from

108 on August 24 to only eight votes three days later. Then, as a mounting stack of Navy documents and a growing chorus of first-hand accounts disputed GOP-funded attacks—and Kerry began responding to personal attacks launched against him during the RNC—the Democratic challenger's advantage fattened to 58 electoral votes on September 7.

Kerry leads by a small margin in former Bush states Tennessee, Nevada and New Hampshire, while Bush is up in former Gore state New Mexico. At one time or another during the past two months, Kerry also led in former Bush states Florida, Arkansas, Ohio, Missouri, Arizona

and West Virginia.

Kerry's electoral vote lead can be largely attributed to the recent major shift of 11 states. Four former battlegrounds have moved to Kerry and seven former Bush states became freshly competitive. Although both presidential campaigns have focused money and attention on Oregon, Washington, New Hampshire, Michigan and New Mexico, those states have moved firmly toward Kerry. At the same time former Bush bastions Colorado, Arizona, Nevada, Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee and Virginia are now in play. Eight ongoing battleground states are currently close; the candidates are within 6 percentage points

of one other. And it now appears that Nader will not be a factor in the November 2 outcome.

The most significant 2004 state polling changes:

- Kerry's lead in Michigan went from 2 percent to 11 percent to the current 4 percent.
- Since May 10, Oregon moved from Bush up 5 percent to Kerry up 11 percent.
- Washington favored Bush in January, but Kerry's ruled ever since, now ahead by 7 points.
- Bush led New Hampshire by 15 percent in April but now trails by 7 percent.
- Since March, Kerry has cut Bush's lead in Nevada from 11 percent to 3 percent.
- Over the last five months Tennessee swung from Bush up 19 percent to Kerry ahead 2 percent.

As excerpted in *In These Times*



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VIKING



- Since mid-July Bush's Arizona margin dropped from 12 percent to 3 percent.
- Colorado shifted from Bush ahead by 9 percent to a tie.
- And over eight months, Bush's 15 percent lead in Virginia plunged to 5 percent.

Bush has lately enjoyed Swift-Boat/RNC attack-dog bounces in Georgia, Minnesota, Missouri, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma and several other states.

The short-term momentum is now clearly with Bush, but Kerry has consistently won in the long term. On September 3, Princeton University analyst and professor Sam Wang gave Kerry a 61 percent chance of winning the electoral vote. But before the Dems break out the bubbly, two massive pitfalls lie ahead.

First is the likelihood of an October surprise. Bush's brain, Karl Rove, is widely believed to have a nasty trick or two up his sleeve. Pakistan may have trapped Osama bin Laden in an Afghan cave and could be planning to produce him just before November 2—three years after our leader promised to bring him in “dead or alive.” A few months ago, Mideast press reports warned that trucks hired by the United States were shipping weapons of mass destruction into Iraq—for timely discovery. And the way has been prepared to postpone the election if we suffer another terror attack.

Second, 98 million U.S. ballots will go into computers that could be used to falsify the results—with no paper record available for recounts (See “Sum of a Glitch,” September 20).

There is some evidence that voting machines turned elections in Georgia and Minnesota in 2002. A week before the Georgia vote, an *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* poll showed popular Democratic Sen. Max Cleland ahead by 5 points. He lost to rabid rightist Saxby Chambliss by 7 points—an inexplicable 12-point swing. Georgia was the first state to use electronic voting devices almost exclusively. In Minnesota, Sen. Paul Wellstone was a shoo-in for reelection when he died in a plane crash. Democratic former Vice President Walter Mondale replaced him and led significantly just days before the election, but Republican Norm Coleman won by an unexpected 11 points on Election Day.

With more states using electronic machines lacking paper records and more Republican electoral tomfoolery afoot in Florida this year, Kerry may need a strong turnout in the honestly counted states to prevail. ■

ALAN WALDMAN is an award-winning writer and political blogger (frogblog.journalspace.com). The information for this story came from the Web site www.race2004.net, which updates its site daily.

APPALL-O-METER

3.0 A to the K, in Full Effect

“Christ would not vote for Barack Obama because Barack Obama has voted to behave in a way that it is inconceivable for Christ to have behaved.”

That, of course, is Alan Keyes, Obama's opponent for an Illinois Senate seat and God's gift to humor writers everywhere.

Keyes' assertion is not without merit, but it leads to all sorts of other meditations that may not redound to the Maryland orator's election chances. Is it conceivable, for example, that Christ, if He were to walk the earth today, would behave in a way consistent with Alan Keyes' campaign style—i.e., as a rank buffoon? Would that be any way to start a major world religion, much less run a country?

A reporter wondered if Keyes believed Jesus would vote for him or choose some third-party candidate. Replied Keyes, too humbly: “People will have to make that judgment for themselves.”

4.2 Turkmenbashi is my Copilot

It's a good thing that places like the former Soviet Republic of Turkmenistan were loosed from the autocratic, atheistic grip of Communism. Now their peoples are free to indulge in spontaneous outpourings of cult-like devotion to colorful, Stalinesque strongmen.

As leadership cults go, it's hard to outdo the franchise Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov has set up. The “Turk-

menbashi,” or Leader of the Turkmen, as the Central Asian dictator is known, has recorded his choicest profundities in a book known as the *Ruhnama*. This scripture, according to the BBC, has become compulsory reading in schools and universities, is widely quoted on billboards, and is placed next to the Koran to be ritually touched by the faithful on their way into mosques. It also figures prominently in the Turkmen driving test.

“The exam in the *Ruhnama* is needed to educate future drivers in the high moral principles of Turkmen society,” a Turkmen official explained.

Once the lucky Turkmen motorist gets

his license, he might choose to drive to the palace of ice Turkmenbashi plans to build in the mountains outside the nation's capital, Ashgabat, in the midst of one of the world's hottest deserts.

3.7 Can I Wear the Cute Beanie Thing, Too?

What is more annoying than a \$40,000 bat mitzvah for a girl named Courtney and her 83 closest friends? A \$40,000 bat mitzvah for a girl named Courtney and friends, where Courtney isn't even Jewish.

The *Chicago Tribune* calls the new phenomenon the “faux mitzvah,” and reports that it's all the rage among upscale goyim, especially in suburbs heavily populated with bona fide sons and daughters of the Torah.

—Dave Mulcahey



A Swift Backlash

Evidence of Bush's dubious service record continues to mount. *By Christopher Hayes*

GEORGE W. BUSH HAS SOME EXPLAINING TO DO.

Following a series of discredited attacks on John Kerry's war record by a group with extensive connections to the Bush campaign, the president's own service, or lack thereof, in the Texas and Alabama National Guard is poised again to become a campaign issue.

On September 5, the Associated Press reported that Freedom of Information Act requests reveal that at least five types of documents which should be included in Bush's Texas National Guard records have not been located. Among them are documents that would explain why Bush refused to take a physical in 1972, which led him to lose his flight status. Days after the AP story,

CBS' "60 Minutes II" revealed that it acquired previously unreported documents showing the Bush family pulled strings to get him into the Guard and a memo written by one of Bush's superiors that said he was pressured to give the young pilot glowing recommendations despite lackluster performance.

Ultimately, at issue is how Bush got into the National Guard during a time when thousands of fellow Texans were desperate to enroll and avoid the draft; whether Bush made up the training sessions he missed in 1972 and '73 after transferring to Alabama; and how he was able to receive an honorable discharge with no evidence that he completed his required duty.

In 1968, with Americans dying at an alarming rate in Vietnam, Bush was intent on avoiding the draft despite supporting the war. To that end, Bush's father reached out through a mutual friend to Ben Barnes, a Democrat who was then Speaker of the Texas House, to request that his son be put first in line for a slot in the Texas National Guard. Both the president and his father maintain that he never received special treatment, but in the September 8 "60 Minutes II" interview, Barnes insisted that Bush was given "preferential treatment" and admitted that he called the head of the Texas Air National Guard to secure his place.

Despite scoring the lowest possible passing grade on a flight aptitude test, Bush was assigned to the Texas Air National Guard, where he trained as a pilot from 1968 until 1972, reporting monthly for duty. But in July 1972 he missed a physical, necessary to retain his flight status. Around the same time, Bush requested and was granted a transfer to the 187th Air Squad in Montgomery, Alabama, where he had a paid job on the Senate campaign of his father's friend, Winton Blount.

While in Alabama, Bush missed nearly six months of drills. One officer says he remembers Bush reporting for duty at the airbase, but nearly every other officer ever interviewed has absolutely no recollection of him appearing. In fact, William Turnipseed, who would have been Bush's supervising officer in Alabama, says Bush never appeared on base. "Had he reported in, I would have had some recall, and I do not," Turnipseed told the

Boston Globe. "I had been in Texas, done my flight training there. If I had had a lieutenant from Texas, I would have remembered."

Another man with no recollection of Bush is Bob Mintz, featured in an ad by Texans for Truth, an independent 527 arm of the online activist group DriveDemocracy.org. Mintz served as a lieutenant colonel in the 187th squadron in Alabama, from 1969 to 1984. "I heard George W. Bush...say, 'I served in the 187th Air National Guard in Montgomery, Alabama,'" Mintz says in the ad. "I said, 'Really, that was my unit? And I don't remember seeing you there.' So I called my friends and said, 'Did you know that George W. Bush served in our unit?' and everyone said, 'No, I never saw him there.'"

In February, the White House released 400 pages of records, including one documenting a dental examination that shows that Bush was in Alabama on January 6, 1973, as well as pay stubs that showed that Bush was credited for make-up sessions. However, none of these documents explains Bush's missed physical or why virtually no one who would have served with him in Alabama can remember seeing him. And the AP's revelation that documents are missing from the file, along with the White House's constantly shifting story about whether all the records have been released, renews suspicion that this documentation might have been "scrubbed" before Bush ran for president to expunge any potentially embarrassing information.

Not surprisingly, the White House has pushed back hard against the new revelations. White House Communications Director Dan Bartlett called Barnes a "partisan Democrat" playing "dirty politics." RNC Chairman Ed Gillespie sent an e-mail to the press slinging Barnes with unsubstantiated charges of "political scandal and financial misdealings."

But unlike the Swift Boat veterans "controversy," in which every official record contradicted charges that Kerry didn't earn his medals, in this case mounting documentary evidence proves that Bush avoided his service obligations. In an election that has focused to a startling degree on Bush and Kerry's respective behavior as young men during Vietnam, the renewed questions could push Bush off-message during the most crucial period of the campaign. If that happens, he may rue the day the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth reared its ugly head. ■

Go to www.inthesetimes.com to read Contributing Editor Christopher Hayes' political blog, *The Ground Up*.



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"Be Bad. Talk Back."

Organizers from Code Pink: Women for Peace were vibrantly visible during counter-convention activities in New York. Members handed out pink and white "Peaceful New York Police" buttons to bemused cops, sported pig snouts and feather boas for a "Hallibacon" demo and raised a rose-tinted ruckus at a FOX News Shut-up-a-thon.

Not just in it for laughs, group members took their objections to the Iraq war to the floor of the Republican National Convention. For three nights in a row, Code Pink activists smuggled in banners, unveiled protest T-shirts and donned message-bearing pink slips, revealing themselves during key moments of high-profile speeches. Dragged away immediately by convention security, a few were subjected to questioning, while others like 40-year-old June Brashares, who disrupted Bush's speech, face charges ranging from assault to disorderly conduct.

On Thursday, the last day of the convention, *In These Times* interviewed Code Pink's Medea Benjamin, the first of the group to protest inside the convention. As we spoke in a cab on the way to a vigil in Union Square, our driver said he had seen a woman "beat up" by convention security on a channel broadcast from Pakistan. Told that the woman in question was in his backseat, he exclaimed "She's great! I'll tell all my friends. I am happy she traveled with me!"



Pretty Effective in Pink

By Jessica Clark

Tell us about your adventure on the floor of the Republican National Convention.

On Tuesday, four of us went in, but I was the designated cannon fodder. It was during Arnold Schwarzenegger's speech, and I got a floor pass and positioned myself as close to Dick Cheney as I could get.

I unfurled a banner, which said "Be Pro Life: Stop the Killing in Iraq." Immediately, the security guards were on me, and I told them, "It's a Republican message, pro-life, can't you see it's OK?" But I realized that whether I unfurled the banner or not, they were going to throw me out of there, so I waved up to Mr. Cheney, and I said "Mr. Cheney, Mr. Cheney"—and he looked at me and his mouth was kind of wide open, like "Shit these Code Pink women get everywhere!"—and I said, "How much money has Halliburton made in Iraq? Aren't you ashamed of war profiteering? End the occupation, bring the troops home."

By that time, they were tackling me, and I remember grabbing on to a banister as they were pulling me down, and suddenly being lifted up into the air and being thrown outside. Once we were outside, where the media couldn't see, they threw me onto the floor and snatched my head off the ground, grabbed my arms and put them in handcuffs, and then picked me up by my hair and started running me down the hallway like I was Osama bin Laden or some crazy terrorist they had just nabbed.

Then they got me into this basement room and threw me down and then everything changed. The good cops came—Secret Service, NYPD detectives—and they did about two and a half hours of interrogation.

Quite a few Code Pink women got onto the floor of the RNC. What does that tell us about the Republicans' ability to provide security?

Well, their security sucks! We got two women in on Monday, we got four women in on Tuesday, we got three women in on Wednesday, and I won't tell you how many women we got in tonight [it turned out to be four], but we got 'em in there!

Code Pink has been very innovative this week. What has it been like?

It's been awesome. We deepened the network we have with the union folks, with different women's groups.

I am disappointed in the Democratic leadership. I wish the Democrats would look back at this week and say, "We should have encouraged them to be out there, because it would have been wrong to let the Republicans have their convention without a stir." I wish the Democrats had some cojones.

How can people get involved in Code Pink?

People can look us up on the Web, www.codepink4peace.org. Anybody who's got time between now and the elections, join us—we're going to Florida to do lots of organizing there to make sure this election isn't stolen, and to make sure that if it is stolen, on November 3 we mobilize. We just turn people out in the streets and we stop them. ■



The Worst Show on Earth

Guiliani's address turned the burning bodies of 9/11 victims into this convention's "thousand points of light"—transmuting human costs into political capital.

THE REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION, TO paraphrase Jon Stewart of "The Daily Show," put on a display of the anger of the enfranchised. They control all three branches of government, they've created the first presidential dynasty in more than a century, they got us into a war on the basis of spite, and they're not going to take it anymore!

It's a peculiar thing, when the powerful rail against the powerless. Peculiar and frightening and grand entertainment, if you can forget that the future of the country is at stake. Indeed, the Republicans' ultra-scripted extravaganza of bile topped the Democrats' love-in convention ratings by more than 2 million viewers. Let's recap the highlights.

Who, for instance, could fail to be amused when Senator Zell Miller—the GOP's yipping dog of a mascot—all but challenged MSNBC's Chris Matthews to pistols at dawn? Up until then, I had taken author Thomas Frank's assertion that the Republicans want to "repeal the 20th Century" to be a metaphor. But Miller's outburst was funny only until you remembered that he had just given the keynote address at a national party convention—for the opposite party in which he says he resides. What does it mean when political discourse in America is such that it's perfectly OK to threaten personal violence, but not OK to admit you speak French?

Speaking of blissful ignorance: How about those Bush girls? It'd be easy to mock Jenna and Barb's giggly, amateurish performance at the convention podium if it weren't so spookily reminiscent of their father's public pre-9/11 persona. Like dad, Jenna and Barbara show a genius for the mainstream. In Washington, the pair is known for frequenting the same divey college hangouts as any recent grad in town who works on a campaign. Never mind that it's their father's campaign, and never mind that he's running for the *presidency*. This regular-girl pose underscored every titter of their not-quite-appropriate speech, with its coy references to "Sex and the City" and partying: "When we were young and irresponsible," they explained, "well, we were young and irresponsible."

Of course, what's inappropriate is relative. I could stand the Bush twins' sub-"Saturday Night Live" punch lines well enough, but Rudy Guiliani's 9/11-themed exercise in hero-porn made for the event's most excruciating moments. Just how plausible could it be that

Guiliani's thoughts at the sight of the burning towers would be, "Thank God George Bush is our president"? Wouldn't "Where are my loved ones?" or "Holy shit!" or just "Why?" or, maybe "I sure wish I knew where my president was right this minute" ring truer? Apparently, the brazen Guiliani doesn't mind that his anecdote makes it seem like he was thinking of this very speech four years ago.

Even worse, though, was the former mayor's attempt to turn the burning bodies of 9/11 victims into this convention's "thousand points of light"—transmuting human costs into political capital.

Guiliani's calculated speech made explicit what everyone had been predicting: The Republicans were going to build their convention platform over bodies of the victims of September 11. Standing on the shoulders of giants, indeed.

This exploitation was painfully compounded by the sharp contrast between dutiful worship of American freedom inside Madison Square Garden and the suppression of freedom outside it. The zealotry of the New York police and their iffy tactics have been reported. And it must have been satisfying, if cold comfort, to those 1,700-plus arrested when the New York courts decided that being locked up indefinitely in a former bus depot was, you know, not exactly legal. But the greatest victory for the protesters outside the Garden may have been mere visibility—whether you were annoyed by, supportive of or conspiring with the anti-RNC masses, they were impossible to ignore, and even the Republicans couldn't keep them off of the evening news.

Amazingly, it was the protesters who made it (more amazingly still) *inside* the convention who got the least press—even those two agitators who managed to interrupt George W. Bush's speech Thursday night. They were smothered by the Secret Service and hidden from a complacent media. They shouted, and they were silenced, and in the media hubbub that followed on the convention's heels about Hurricane Frances and the tragedy in a Russian school, the press somehow lost their names.

They do have names, of course, and a story to tell (see "Pretty Effective in Pink," page 11). But this lacuna, and the camera's sudden, jerky move on and off the disruption these two individuals caused, may have proved to be the convention's most singular, most evocative and most representative moment. ■



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Black Muslims and the Sudan

IT HAS TAKEN A GENOCIDE IN DARFUR, WHERE hundreds of thousands have been killed in a brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing and countless more continue to die in disease-ridden refugee camps, to force influential segments of the black activist community to put aside their differences and acknowledge a long history of ongoing atrocities in the Sudan.

For years, some black activists have charged the Islamic government of Sudan with supporting Arab militias that raid Christian and traditionalist areas of southern Sudan and force their black African captives into slavery. Others argued that those charges were manufactured primarily to justify Western intervention in the region.

Initially, the disagreement was centered in the Black Nationalist community and, to put it simply, was divided between nationalists who were Muslim and those who were Pan-Africanists. Many Muslim nationalists believed the charges of slavery were fabricated for the purpose of anti-Islamic propaganda. But Pan-African nationalists found more than a grain of truth in the charges and pushed the issue into the public light.

The apparent sectarian character of the militia raids eventually energized various Christian groups and they began mobilizing in opposition to the Sudanese government. The ardent support of these often right-wing groups further clouded the issue for many black activists who suspected their new allies had ulterior motives.

Thus, the effort to bring attention to the issue of slavery in the Sudan was crippled. But a dedicated group of pan-African nationalists continued to push the cause and consistently condemned the Sudan's Islamic regime; some blamed prominent black Muslims for helping to keep the issue off the table.

"Black Muslims were reluctant to criticize the Islamist government in the Sudan, which is based in the north in Khartoum, because of their religious and other ties," says Nate Clay, talk-show host, newspaper publisher and one of the most vocal members of this pan-Africanist group.

Clay is gratified that so many black activists, politicians and celebrities have been willing to get arrested in front of the Sudanese embassy in Washington D.C. in the last few months to protest the atrocities in Darfur. But he also is a little disgusted.

"What really bothers me about this sudden flash of consciousness is that they've only become interested in the Sudan in the face of the white media's interest in the issue," he says. "Where were they when the Suda-

nese government and its Arab militia were busy killing 2 million black Africans in the southern Sudan?"

He believes African-American leaders were intimidated by black Muslims—in particular, Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan. "Farrakhan knows about this and I've heard him condemn Arab racism. But he talks out of both sides of his mouth. I think he has become too dependent on Arab money."

But the latest conflict in Darfur pits Muslim against Muslim. As Eric Reeves reported in the September 20 issue of *In These Times* (See "Deathly Silence," p. 8), members of the tribal groups most affected by the ethnic cleansing are Muslim, as are the government and its Arab militia (the Janjaweed). Although the government reportedly got involved to suppress political opposition, the conflict now seems to be driven by ethnic, or at least cultural, animosities. Many members of the Janjaweed are dark-skinned Africans who identify with Arab culture. They would more accurately be called Arabized militia.

Since the religious component has been neutralized, several African-American Islamic groups have joined the protest against the Sudanese government's treatment of the Muslim tribal groups that don't identify themselves as Arabs. In fact, one group—Project Islamic H.O.P.E.—has called for Islamic governments and organizations to protest Khartoum's action in Darfur.

"These Arab and Muslim leaders seek out our support on issues like Palestinian rights, religious racial profiling of civil liberties violations and American treatment of Islamic countries, but these Muslim leaders aren't saying anything about the genocide of the African population in the Sudan," says Najee Ali, founder of Islamic H.O.P.E. The issue also sparked some heated discussions at the recent convention of the American Society of Muslims, the largest group of indigenous Muslims in the country.

The situation in Darfur is forcing a focus on an issue the Muslim world has tended to avoid: race. And although the Western media's depiction of the current conflict as one between Arab and African groups is too simplistic, there is a well-documented history of anti-black Arab bias in the region that has seldom been explored.

So, while Darfur has closed gaps between black activists, it has opened one between Muslims. Too bad it required the tragedy of another African genocide to provoke a conversation about Arab racism that is long past overdue. ■

The situation in Darfur is forcing a focus on an issue the Muslim world has tended to avoid: race.

SALIM MUWAKKIL is a senior editor at *In These Times*, a contributing columnist to the *Chicago Tribune* and a *Crime and Communities Media Fellow* of the *Open Society Institute*.



House Call *By Rep. Bernie Sanders*

Time to Commit

The middle class is shrinking, the gap between the rich and poor is growing and poverty is increasing: This is the Bush legacy.

AS THE ONLY ELECTED INDEPENDENT IN THE U.S. House of Representatives and the longest-serving congressional Independent in American history, I want to take this opportunity to share some thoughts with progressives struggling over which candidate to support for president on Election Day.

First, let me state as clearly as I can that George W. Bush's reelection would be a disaster. I write this as someone who is not a Democrat and who, as a member of Congress, has differed with John Kerry on a number of important issues. In terms of economic policy, among many other issues, however, the choice is clear. It is absolutely essential that Kerry win November 2.

If Bush is reelected the United States increasingly will resemble an impoverished Third World country in which a few families have incredible wealth while the vast majority struggle to survive.

The middle class is shrinking, the gap between the rich and poor is growing and poverty is increasing: This is the Bush legacy.

He will be the first president since Herbert Hoover and the Great Depression to oversee a decline in employment in a single term. Despite huge tax breaks to the rich and large corporations, our country has lost jobs under his reign. Equally important, the jobs being created pay substantially less than those lost. Incidentally, because of outsourcing and disastrous trade policies with China and other countries, in the last three years alone we have lost 2.7 million good-paying manufacturing jobs—16 percent of that sector. We are now on the verge of losing millions of high-tech jobs to India and elsewhere. In the midst of all of this, Bush and Co. support outsourcing and the anti-American actions of their corporate allies.

While corporate America throws American workers out on the street and move their jobs abroad, wages are no longer keeping up with inflation. They fell 1.1 percent in June—the steepest decline in real hourly wages since 1991. In fact, real hourly wages declined in five of the six previous months. Because the middle class is shrinking, the average American employee is working the longest hours in the industrialized world—and 62 percent say their workload has increased over the last six months, a situation about to worsen because of new Bush rules that cut overtime pay for 6 million employees. Poverty

also increased by 1.3 million in the last year alone; hunger and homelessness are on the rise.

Yet, the wealthiest people have never had it so good. The gap between the rich and the poor is now wider than at any time since the 1920s, with the richest 1 percent owning more wealth than the bottom 90 percent. Corporate profits are soaring, and compensation of CEOs of our largest corporations is 500 times greater than their workers.

The United States also remains the only major country that does not guarantee healthcare for all its citizens, and this situation only worsened in the last four years. Five million more Americans lost their health insurance since Bush took office, and today we have a record 45 million without any coverage. As health insurance premiums soar, workers are being asked to contribute more in premiums, deductibles and co-payments. Meanwhile, the administration attempts to privatize Medicare and, just last week, announced the largest premium increase in the Medicare program's history, raising the monthly expense by \$11.60 to \$78.20.

While the cost of prescription drugs soars Bush has defended the pharmaceutical industry, which heavily funded his campaign, by trying to stop all efforts to end the national disgrace of Americans paying, by far, the highest prices in the world for their medicine.

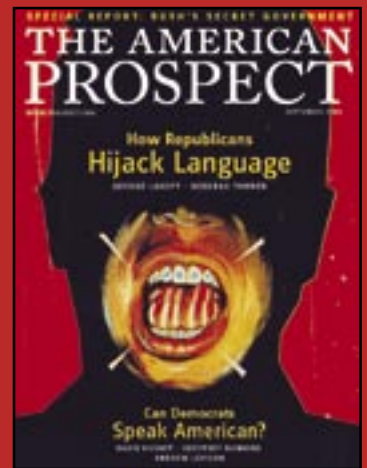
President Bush and the Republican leadership have provided hundreds of billions in tax breaks to the richest 1 percent, people with an average income of more than \$1 million a year. And in the process have created record-breaking deficits and a \$7 trillion national debt—spurring Alan Greenspan and other financial leaders to advocate cuts in Social Security benefits. In fact, all programs that benefit the middle class are now at risk.

Bush has thrown 160,000 veterans off VA health-care, and his new Veterans budget will substantially raise fees for the men and women who have put their lives on the line defending our nation. In the midst of a major crisis in affordable housing, the president also wants to decimate the Section 8 program.

This campaign isn't about George Bush and John Kerry. (And it certainly isn't about Ralph Nader; a progressive vote for Nader is in effect a vote for Bush.) It's about a corporate class that has gained unprecedented ground in the last four years and, by extension, the territory ceded by the rest of America. ■



REP. BERNIE SANDERS is Vermont's Independent Congressman and a member of the Progressive Caucus. For more information visit www.Bernie.house.gov.



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A Republican delegate reacts during George W. Bush's speech at the Republican National Convention, September 2.

CROSS CULTURE

By Will Boisvert

Uncivil civility, unfunny comedy, and the search for self at the RNC

STEVEN GUSTAVE HAS A SHAVED head, Vin Diesel muscles and a black-leather biker outfit, and is waving a red flag emblazoned with the defiant Che Guevara. Gustave is, in short, your typical Kerry voter at the big August 29 march protesting the Republican Convention. Republicans had hoped, and Democrats had feared, that such an apparition would herald 1968-style convention violence, with attendant conservative backlash. But Gustave, a fashion designer from Manhattan, turns out to be a genial, thoughtful man, ready to lay aside his “red anarchism” and “proudly march with soccer moms from Connecticut” for the benefit of a pro-war liberal.

The march is a sign both of the unifying power of anti-Bush animus and the strange contortions of politics and culture in an era when the left organizes pissed-off radio talk shows and the right spits on a Vietnam veteran's medals. It's now commonplace that, from Reagan Democrats to Hollywood liberals, the electorate votes its cultural affinities, not its pocketbook, and party conventions occupy center stage in the effort to repackage political interests as tribal and demographic allegiances. This year the Republicans even trotted out the Bush twins. Like a distaff Beavis and Butthead, they chuckled moronically at their grandmother's sexual stodginess, as if they feared estate-tax repeal was not hip enough to make the Paris Hiltons of the world feel at home in the party.

A motley tribe

Protest marches, of course, are nothing if not chanting, drumming cultural bonding rituals, which is probably why so many clashing placards can peacefully coexist. Kerry/Edwards supporters march shoulder-to-shoulder with the Nader/Camejo contingent and the “Oppose Bush, Kerry, Nader and all capitalist politicians” stalwart. The blissful “Make Love Not War”

floats alongside the pitiless “Destroy All Forms of Classism.” And the consensus that we should “Support Our Troops—Bring Them Home” makes room for the International Bolshevik Tendency's (sic) “Military Victory to the Iraqi Resistance.”

The only inassimilable idea surfaces amid a knot of Republican counter-demonstrators on the sidewalk. Their sign says “Support President Bush—Trust Jesus!” below which are black silhouettes of weapons—an M-16 rifle, an attack helicopter, a bomb—along with the line from Hebrews 9:22: “And almost all things are by the law purged with blood.”irate leftists converge on the sign, chanting “What would Jesus bomb?”, a slogan that used to sound like glib sarcasm but suddenly seems an incisive and troubling question. I ask the bronzed fireplug of a man holding the sign what message he's trying to send. He considers it self-evident: “Don't be such a leftist commie pinko!” As he is speaking, a woman holds up two fingers behind his head to make rabbit ears. Catching her, the man turns to her husband and barks, “Control your woman!” The husband sputters in a British accent and the counter-demonstrator taunts, “Most men control their women in this country. *Or maybe you're the more female!*” A cop comes over and tells the woman to stop making rabbit ears.

No, funny strange

After the march I head to a comedy show sponsored by Americans for Tax Reform, featuring a lineup of Republican congressmen, journalists and operatives doing stand-up. The show promises another tableau of dissonant political culture. Since Mort Sahl's heyday, stand-up has been a left-liberal preserve—its hip, ironic, sexually provocative tone anathema to the GOP tradition of stentorian squareness. But with *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* recently

winning a Television Critics Association Prize for news commentary, the line between public affairs and comedy seems obsolete, and Republicans can no longer do without killer material.

There are a lot of tax-relief punch lines (“If 10 percent is good enough for God, it's good enough for government!”) but some acts are smoother. GOP mastermind Grover Norquist takes on Americans' fabled inability to find other countries on the map. “Have you ever *needed* to find France?” he asks the audience, getting a raucous “No!” in response. Only airline pilots do, says Norquist, and he does a bit about a clueless pilot asking his passengers where France is, finally segueing from geography to riffs on other useless school subjects like algebra and the metric system. Norquist's timing and delivery are excellent and the France-bashing goes over big. If he seems to be advancing an Every Child Left Behind agenda, with learning parceled out on a strict need-to-know basis, that view sits well with a libertarian crowd used to thinking of education as a prosaic human-capital investment.

Norquist is followed by Rep. Jack Kingston (R-Ga.), whose routine features doctored photo slides of Kerry and Bush. Childhood photos portray Kerry the effete Fauntleroy—playing the piano, reading a history of France—while Bush wears a goofy grin and rides a cow. Slides of Kerry's Vietnam service follow: His barracks is a mansion, his Swift boat a luxury yacht. The photos send the audience into hysterics. Kingston doesn't show any slides of Bush from the Vietnam era.

GOPAC's brass tacks

To probe the authentic culture of the Republican Party, and not what's portrayed on TV, there's no better place to go than a training seminar run by GOPAC, the political consulting organization charged with building the party from the grassroots level. Here,



A protestor identified as Terra Lawson-Remer lowers herself to a waiting police officer after she helped unfurl a banner on the facade of the Plaza Hotel.

PETER MORGAN / REUTERS

two strikingly different messages compete. One is the “party of ideas” theme sounded by headliners like Newt Gingrich. He paints the GOP as the vanguard of history itself, ready to deal with the blinding “pace of change,” the demographic crisis of retiring baby boomers, a 70-year war on terror and the looming four-century struggle with the surging economies of India and China. The other is a markedly less high-minded take on Republican praxis offered by a slew of second-tier operatives. After paying lip service to ideas, GOPAC field trainer Rick Tyler reminds the audience that “campaigns are never the time to educate the public; your job is to win.” And winning, he makes clear, requires full immersion in the sleaze, spin and sophistry of Republican gutter politics. Ideas can be anything—Tyler once ran a winning campaign solely on the removal of local speed-bumps—as long as they are framed in “good vs. bad” terms: “*Their* vision is pimps and prostitutes and people dealing drugs in the park; *my* vision is people taking their families to the park.” He recommends introducing Gen Y-ers to conservatism by pointing to the FICA tax deducted from their paycheck and telling them “You’ll never see

that money again.” And because “people will never read your brochure, *ever*,” you must “use pictures to tell stories”—pictures of your smiling family and, above all, your dog.

As the seminar proceeds, profound differences between Republicans and the left emerge that go beyond cultural trappings. Take their diverging attitudes to the Constitution. Among the left-liberal protest gatherings are a reading of the Constitution by Hollywood stars and a revival meeting led by anti-consumerism crusader Reverend Billy that climaxed in a group recitation of the First Amendment. The left loves the Constitution’s glories, but the right loves its warts—its jury-rigged machinery of divided government, labyrinthine federalism and electoral indirection, which GOPAC exploits in its climb to power. GOPAC Director John Morgan lays out a four-stage process for taking Republican state caucuses from “laughable minority” to “sustainable majority.” These machinations have paid off with a comfortable Republican lead in state legislatures and governorships. In turn, the gerrymandering of congressional districts by Republican statehouses has leveraged the party’s majority in Congress. The presidency also is tied in, Morgan asserts,

as Florida’s Republican legislature would have returned a slate of Bush electors in the 2000 election had the Supreme Court not squelched the battle. GOPAC’s party-building embodies a vast and subtle teleology linking the humblest county board race to the Oval Office, an astonishing fulfillment of the left chestnut about acting locally and thinking globally.

It also bespeaks a right-wing absorption in the nitty-gritty of politics that the left simply can’t match. “It’s not normal, it’s a sickness,” Tyler says of GOPAC activists’ obsession with politics that goes well beyond that of the electorate. By contrast, leftists dream of a revolutionary catharsis that will end politics forever by abolishing class divisions. The anarchists hand out leaflets extolling an essentially apolitical future with “a new form of democracy that makes voting irrelevant.” Republicans don’t expect a cathartic end to politics—at least not until the Rapture. Like the business class they serve, for whom life is the daily wringing out of marginal profits that may someday amount to a fortune, they embrace a politics of endless clawing for tiny advantages that may one day add up to a big fat tax cut. That attitude gives the right extraordinary fortitude in its creeping takeover of government.

Indirect action

I go straight from the GOPAC meeting to Herald Square. There protest groups have promised a night of “direct action” as a cathartic alternative to the electoral politics at which GOPAC excels. The police already have shut down the intersection, but restless crowds are gathering on the corners, among them a handful of college kids who link arms and mutter conspiratorially. I ask them what their game plan is, since I can’t imagine how they’ll retake the streets from the enormous police cordon, but they remain tight-lipped. A moment later, when the cops start pushing back the crowd from the curb, their game plan turns out to consist of vaulting the police barriers and dashing into the intersection, where the cops instantly tackle them and haul them off.

These kids have guts, for the police are fearsome and their holding pens foul, but it’s all a far cry from the golden age of direct action during the civil rights movement. Then, activists invaded the public space of lunch counters and voter registration offices simply to eat lunch and register to vote. The repression they provoked indelibly marked Jim Crow as a violent and illegitimate disruption of any civilized moral order. Now, direct action has degenerated into blocking traffic and fighting meaningless turf battles with the cops.

One of its few dubious triumphs occurred when a grouplet used mountaineering techniques to hang a giant anti-Bush banner from a Midtown hotel. This enthusiasm for politics as Xtreme sport is a particularly baffling cultural tic of the protest left. The perpetrators proudly told reporters they had spent months dangling in a Brooklyn loft practicing the action, and it did make a splash for half an hour until police tore down the banner. Their success will doubtless inspire many campus leftists, convinced that rock-climbing has something to do with political organizing, to sharpen their rappelling skills at the next Ruckus Society camp. Meanwhile, college Republicans will join the debate team.

Down and dirty

Why don't Republicans hold huge protest marches? I put the question to a small, subdued crowd at yet another GOP comedy show, this one by professional conservative comics at the Laugh Factory. "Republicans are too civilized," harrumphs a middle-aged man. A college Republican concurs. He has just come from a demo, where his sign—"Help Keep America SHIT-FREE Please Flush the

Johns" [i.e., Kerry and Edwards]—provoked the expected incivility from protesters.

Republican civility is something conservative comics wrestle with, given it inhibits their use of the shock effects that modern stand-up relies on. Headliner Jeff Wayne, a florid man with a jolly, beefy face, drops a few F-bombs right off the bat, to modest laughter. Then he tries an edgy gay marriage riff. "If I found some [man] to take care of me, went to work while I stayed home, bought me things"—he grows so nervous that he flubs the punch line ("and all I had to do was let him blow me once a week") and backs off with an embarrassed "Maybe I've gone too far for you." He returns to safer ground with a reminiscence about the 1968 Chicago convention: "Oh, they beat the hell out of those people!" Wayne tells me that the demands of convention week wore him down, especially that morning's listless, squeaky-clean breakfast performance for the Minnesota delegation.

Comic Chris Warren, standing on a stage flanked by red velvet curtains that evoke the club's previous incarnation as a 42nd Street porno palace, is determined to shat-

ter civility constraints. He launches into a midnight-blue routine that wanders from Iraqi "piss-holes" to the promise and pitfalls of entering Paradise with 72 virgins. And the Republicans laugh.

He closes with a lengthy riff about liberal hypocrites who ride bikes and refuse to eat meat but don't admit that bikes indirectly use up oil and that plants have a right to live. The truly consistent liberal, he contends, would end up naked and starving, shivering in a cave so squalid that no animal wants it, while the conservative, at peace with his position atop the food chain, happily drives his SUV and savors a thick, juicy sirloin. The bit drips with Nietzschean irony, underscoring that prissy liberal efforts to mitigate the world's cruelty merely displace that cruelty to less conspicuous locales. And it offers a glimpse into a certain variant of the Republican id, one that believes freedom, at some irreducible level, is always and everywhere the freedom to exploit. ■

WILL BOISVERT is a writer in New York. He thanks Karen Roth and Rick Perlstein for their invaluable assistance.

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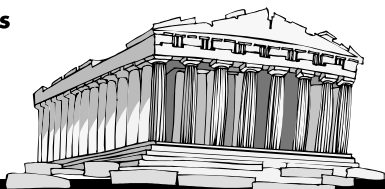
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Fiction First, Spin Later

Bush values steer clear of facts and conservative tradition.



BY HANS JOHNSON

IN 1917, SEN. HIRAM JOHNSON (R-Cal.) warned a restless nation, “The first casualty when war comes is truth.” Johnson saw the risk posed by trigger-happy reporters and presidents mistaking passion for facts while dispatching others to march in enemy crosshairs. He noted that Americans are ready to dig trenches and take casualties for a battle we believe in. Yet our cause is weakened and our sacrifices cheapened if we fight under false pretenses.

Johnson would hardly recognize what his party has turned into, an eerie ship of statecraft setting the country on a perilous course. The crew at its helm would not welcome him on board for fear he would expose their deviation from honest governance. The Bush administration has shown Johnson was right: It unfurls unfounded accusations against critics and uses bold forms of distortion and denial to cover its lies.

All this raises a poignant question Bush is more eager to dodge than the Vietnam draft: Are we better off than we were four years ago?

Of course not. So what are the true values underpinning the administration’s actions that have led us to this decline?

Silence dissent

The Bush team immediately denounces skepticism about its policies as grumpiness or bias, and in this regard, they *have* made good on their pledge to change the tone in Washington. They treat every inconvenient truth like a nuisance that can be shushed, dispelled or killed with partisan bile.

On at least two occasions this summer, the

Bush advance team tossed out the president’s critics—who later would lose their jobs.

During a Bush campaign stop at the West Virginia statehouse, officers carted off a couple in handcuffs. Their offense? “We sang the national anthem,” Jeff Rank told the *Charleston Gazette*. After her arrest, Nicole Rank was fired from her job at the Federal Emergency Management Agency, where she assisted with flood repair in the state.

A few weeks later, Glen Hiller of Berkeley Springs, W.V., was escorted out of a high school in the state’s northeastern panhandle. Hiller tried to ask Bush about the progress of the war and weapons he and his administration insisted Iraq possessed. Afterward, Hiller was fired from his job at a Maryland design firm with GOP ties. “It’s just bizarre that you disagree with them and it all turns evil,” he told the Associated Press.

Don’t tax, but still spend

The facts on the ground in Iraq have severely challenged the administration’s ability to lie its way out of its limitless policy failures.

The Congressional Budget Office put a \$213 billion tag on the invasion and occupation, about four times the level of last year’s rosy projections by Bush. Today the nation’s treasury log reads like a giant ransom note to today’s children, rife with red ink from the record \$422 billion deficit they will repay. And the roll call of fewer jobs, lower wages and diminished healthcare coverage revives talk of the “misery index.”

Mistreat Americans

Census figures released in late August showed that more Americans lost health

insurance in 2003—a 13 percent increase in uninsured people since 2000. After dipping throughout the late 1990s, the total reached 16 percent of the whole population last year, or about 44 million adults and children.

That same census data also shows that businesses have taken to throwing out the social contract, expecting full-time work without health benefits.

Meanwhile, seniors are shunning the new prescription coverage ballyhooed by the White House. “Bush’s Medicare prescription drug program is terrible,” Ruth Tubbs of Connecticut told the Alliance for Retired Americans this summer. Only about 10 percent of the eligible 40 million Medicare recipients have enrolled in the scheme that promised hefty discounts. The Bush plan relied on corporations to back up the cost-reduction pledge. But in late August, one linchpin of the program, Pfizer, cancelled its discount card. The move left more than half a million seniors “high and dry,” Robert Hayes of the Medicare Rights Center told the *New York Times*. It was, he said, “a harbinger of trouble ahead.”

One week later, the Bush team hiked Medicare premiums by 17 percent.

Cut jobs and opportunity

Conservatives have long asserted that the best social program is full-time work. Such rhetoric is particularly callous in today’s job market, which has gone south since Bush came north. Bush has presided over an economy that has shed more than a million jobs overall. Manufacturing has declined by nearly 3 million jobs, only to be replaced by less stable, lower-paying work. In August,

one of the rosier periods on W's watch, the addition of 144,000 jobs did not match the break-even level of 150,000 needed to keep pace with population growth.

Studies by the Economic Policy Institute, based on data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, show that new jobs tend to pay 25 percent less than the jobs being lost or exported to other countries. They also are much less likely to include health coverage.

In North Carolina, according to the *Raleigh News and Observer*, a 5 percent unemployment rate conceals a host of underemployed people. "I was four years from paying off the house," Chuck Harner told the paper, recalling the well-paying job he recently lost at a technology company. In his new part-time job, he makes as much after four weeks as he once did in a day. "I'll never own this place now," he said.

The number of part-time workers in the Tarheel State has grown by 20 percent in the Bush years, reaching 23 percent of the overall workforce. The downshift hits workers of color particularly hard.

Put a chicken foot in every pot

Bush's incessant cheerleading about "turning the corner" is painful to watch and impossible to credit. His endorsement of outsourcing as an economic stimulus, coupled with widespread National Guard call-ups, has subjected working Americans to enormous pressure. In both raw and adjusted terms, median household income dropped last year, continuing a slide of 2 percent since Bush took office. The pay gap between women and men widened last year, contrary to the recent trend. Financial neediness increased more than 10 percent since 2001, with one in eight families below the poverty line. Also, more families with small children were poor in 2003, up from 18.5 to 20 percent.

Poverty has risen even as the unemployment rate remains stable. In part, this reflects the shift toward part-time work and speed-ups. MBG Info Services, which tracks shifts in employment, shows total paid hours are 4 percent below January 2001. But productivity continues to post gains, suggesting that faster, more efficient workers aren't being rewarded.

Bush's overtime rules have triggered widespread doubt and anger. Bush rammed the regulations through Congress despite opposition by majorities in both chambers, masked this corporate giveaway with a Pol-lyanna routine. "[T]his is a tremendous benefit to workers and is a big benefit to businesses," a Labor Department lawyer said.

But even neutral observers cried foul. "The administration's numbers are just wrong," human-resource publisher Jay Whitehead said. He agrees with labor estimates that about 3 million workers lose overtime coverage under the new Bush rules.

Don't give a hoot, pollute

Bush has perhaps shined most when it comes to misusing land, destroying habitat, and contaminating our air and water. He has ignored the counsel of Republican forbears such as Teddy Roosevelt, who warned against "defenders of the short-sighted men who in their greed and selfishness will, if permitted, rob our country of half its charm by their reckless extermination of all useful and beautiful wild things."

In his recent book *Crimes Against Nature*, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., of the Natural Resources Defense Council, writes: "George W. Bush will go down in history as America's worst environmental president. In a ferocious three-year attack, the Bush administration

has initiated more than 200 major rollbacks of America's environmental laws, weakening the protection of our country's air, water, public lands and wildlife. ... I am angry both as a citizen and a father. Three of my sons have asthma, and I watch them struggle to breathe on bad-air days."

The president hides his damage through masterful propaganda. "Under the guidance of Republican pollster Frank Luntz," writes Kennedy, "the Bush White House has actively hidden its anti-environmental program behind deceptive rhetoric, telegenic spokespeople, secrecy and the intimidation of scientists and bureaucrats. After three years, his policies are already bearing fruit, diminishing standards of living for millions of Americans."

Abstain from sex ed

Bush's insistence on abstinence-only messages in public programs has hamstrung health educators in bringing life-saving prevention and education work to

Continued on page 28

Text of President-Elect George W. Bush's Victory Speech on December 14, 2000:

I am optimistic that we can change the tone of Washington, D.C. I believe things happen for a reason, and I hope the long wait of the last five weeks will heighten a desire to move beyond the bitterness and partisanship of the recent past.

Our nation must rise above a house divided. Americans share hopes and goals and values far more important than any political disagreements. Republicans want the best for our nation. So do Democrats. Our votes may differ, but not our hopes.

I know America wants reconciliation and unity. I know Americans want progress. And we must seize this moment and deliver. Together, guided by a spirit of common sense, common courtesy and common goals, we can unite and inspire the American citizens.

Together, we will work to make all our public schools excellent, teaching every student of every background and every accent, so that no child is left behind. Together, we will save Social Security and renew its promise of a secure retirement for generations to come.

Together, we will strengthen Medicare and offer prescription drug coverage to all of our seniors. Together, we will give Americans the broad, fair and fiscally responsible tax relief they deserve.

Together, we will have a bipartisan foreign policy true to our values and true to our friends. And we will have a military equal to every challenge, and superior to every adversary.

Together, we will address some of society's deepest problems one person at a time, by encouraging and empowering the good hearts and good works of the American people. This is the essence of compassionate conservatism, and it will be a foundation of my administration.

These priorities are not merely Republican concerns or Democratic concerns, these are American responsibilities. ...

I was not elected to serve one party, but to serve one nation. The president of the United States is the president of every single American, of every race and every background. Whether you voted for me or not, I will do my best to serve your interests, and I will work to earn your respect.

DESPERATELY SEEKING THE SENATE

Centrist Democrats vie for open seats

By David Moberg



The battle for the White House overshadows all politics this fall, but in the U.S. Senate Democrats have a shot at overturning the 51-to-48-seat Republican majority. Given the politics of the contenders, Democratic control would not bring a dramatic ideological shift, but it would give Democrats control of committees—providing a platform for legislative initiatives and investigations that could prove critical if Bush wins.

At first glance, the Democrats face daunting prospects. They are defending 19 seats, the Republicans only 15.

In five Southern states incumbent Democrats are retiring, and all but one of the tightest races are in states where Bush has a clear edge. That one exception—Florida—is a presidential battleground, where energetic voter registration, Kerry campaign initiatives and independent expenditures could boost Democratic chances.

But otherwise, only a few Democratic candidates in these hotly contested races are likely to be helped significantly by a strong Kerry campaign. Organized labor, other progressive movements, and independent efforts for voter registration and turnout are also relatively weak in these key races.

Yet Republicans in several of these key states have flawed candidates or face deep divisions between conservative factions. Additionally, the feeble economy, growing doubts about the war in Iraq, and voters' predisposition to trust Democrats more on issues such as healthcare and education all work to Democrats' advantage. If the GOP can make cultural issues like abortion and gay marriage

the central domestic issues in the fall elections, their advantage could grow, but many Democrats in these races also favor abortion restrictions and a constitutional gay-marriage ban.

Win some, lose some

Democrats are certain to pick up at least one Republican seat in Illinois, where Barack Obama is routing right-winger Alan Keyes, who was recently attacked by his own party leaders for making "idiotic" and "extremist" remarks against gays in general and Vice President Cheney's lesbian daughter Mary in particular. But Republicans also are virtually certain to win the seat being vacated by Zell Miller, the Democrat in name only who mendaciously savaged Kerry at the Republican Convention.

Most incumbents are relatively safe, but there are some close races. Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle is a slight favorite to retain his seat in South Dakota against Rep. John Thune, and liberal Washington Sen. Patty Murray is likely to turn back an attack by staunchly conservative Rep. George Nethercutt.

In Alaska, Democratic former Gov. Tony Knowles has a good chance of defeating Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski, who was appointed to the Senate seat by her father when he became governor. Yet both candidates support drilling for oil in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge, putting Knowles at odds with his party and Kerry.

In Missouri, Pennsylvania and Ohio, Democratic challengers—respectively, State Treasurer Nancy Farmer, Rep. Joseph Hoeffel

and Rep. Eric Fingerhut—appear far less likely to upset incumbents Kit Bond, Arlen Specter and George Voinovich, despite dismal state economic conditions.

The key races

Ultimately, the balance of power will come down to five to 12 key races, mainly for open seats where moderate to conservative Democrats face right-wing Republicans.

In Colorado, where Republican incumbent Ben Nighthorse Campbell is retiring, Attorney General Ken Salazar, an experienced politician from a Hispanic family with deep roots in rural Colorado, defeated a more progressive African-American educator in the Democratic primary. The Republican candidate is beer magnate and conservative political novice Peter Coors, whose family has long bankrolled far-right causes. In the primary Coors recruited new, moderate Republican voters to turn back a challenge by former Rep. Bob Schaffer, whose backers accused Coors of employing “pornographic” advertising for his beer and promoting “the radical homosexual agenda” because the Coors Brewing Company provides benefits to gay employees’ partners. (Coors himself supports a federal constitutional ban on same-sex marriage.) Republicans hold the edge in party affiliation, but the large bloc of independents and a gain in Democratic registrations have given new hope to the campaigns of both Kerry and Salazar (whose agenda resembles Kerry’s), especially with the state’s far right still squabbling. As Denver labor federation leader Leslie Moody says, “[Salazar] brings out a bunch of voters not otherwise enfranchised.”

In North Carolina, former Clinton Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles seems to have learned from his losing 2002 bid for Jesse Helms’ old seat and has adopted a mildly populist focus on jobs, healthcare and trade. With retiring Sen. John Edwards on the presidential ticket, the well-financed Bowles continues to have an advantage over the very conservative Rep. Richard Burr, who has run a lackluster campaign. Burr draws support from rural areas despite Bowles’ critique of his failure to fight for a tobacco farmer buyout; Bowles is strong in urban and high-tech centers.

With the Kerry campaign virtually abandoning next-door South Carolina, despite Edwards’ appeal there, State Education Superintendent and popular state Democratic politician Inez Tenenbaum is in a tough race against Rep. Jim DeMint. DeMint, a conservative free-trader and advocate of replacing the income tax with a national sales tax, may yet damage himself given a penchant for remarks like telling laid-off workers: “Stop whining about job losses.” Tenenbaum is running on a platform more protective of jobs against trade threats and outsourcing, but she is culturally conservative—supporting the war in Iraq, the death penalty, some restrictions on abortion and amending the constitution to ban gay marriage.

Democrats have a good chance of holding the Louisiana seat being vacated by conservative Democrat John Breaux, but the outcome will almost certainly be determined in a runoff after November. There also is a chance for Democrats to take the Oklahoma seat left open when Republican Don Nickles retired. Far right former Rep. Tom Coburn, who advocates the death penalty for “abortionists,” won an upset in a bitter Republican primary. Despite Bush’s almost guaranteed win there, Democratic state Rep. Brad Carson

entered the final two months only slightly behind. A moderate conservative by Oklahoma standards, Carson touts his National Rifle Association endorsement, his support for a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage, his “Christian faith” and his distance from the Democratic Party and its national candidates.

Unlike most of the Senate swing states, the race in Florida—between Democratic former State Education Commissioner Betty Castor and Republican former Housing and Urban Development Secretary Mel Martinez—may be influenced by the presidential race. The Republican primary left the party wounded. It often appeared to be a fight over who was the most anti-gay, with Martinez

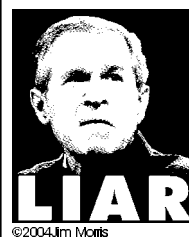
Ultimately, the balance of power will come down to five to 12 key races, mainly for open seats where moderate to conservative Democrats face right-wing Republicans.

attacking right-winger Bill McCollum as “anti-family” and a tool of the “radical homosexual lobby” for his support of hate crimes legislation and stem-cell research. Castor, who comes from central Florida but has statewide name recognition, has emphasized moderate policy positions on education and healthcare.

Self-fulfilling failure?

Even if Democrats succeed at winning the Senate, it will not result in a long-term and coherent strategy to build a national party and will only slightly advance a progressive agenda. Both goals require much long-term effort, especially in the South, where defeat often has been self-fulfilling, says College of Charleston professor Jack Bass. Not only are large numbers of African-Americans still not registered or mobilized in the South, but only 20 percent of white working-class males vote, partly, Bass says, because “they don’t have anything to vote for.”

Building support for a strong populist economic policy could reduce the influence of the cultural and religious right and mobilize those missing voters, making a future battle for the Senate less dependent on a hodgepodge of campaigns defined by cultural conservatism. Until then, Democrats will have to scramble for victory any way they can get it. ■



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The explosive growth of slums—such as this area outside Jakarta, Indonesia—is perhaps the crucial geopolitical event of our time.

CHOO YOUN-KONG / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

BY SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

The Free World ... of Slums

Although Timothy Garton Ash is my political opponent, I've always admired his wealth of precise observations and found him a reliable source on the vicissitudes of post-Communist Eastern Europe. In his new book, *The*

Free World: America, Europe and the Suprising Future of the West, Ash applies his signature bitterly witty approach to the growing tensions between key Western European states and the United States. His *aperçus* about the relations among the United Kingdom, France and Germany recall the gentle irony of a novel of manners, giving a new twist to the old topic of "European trinity."

Hegel was among the first to interpret the geographic triad of Germany-France-England as expressing three existential attitudes: German reflective thoroughness, French revolutionary hastiness and English moderate pragmatism. In terms of political stances, this triad can be read as German conservatism, French radicalism and English liberalism. In

terms of a predominating social sphere, it is German culture versus French politics versus English economy. Ash observes that today this trinity has undergone a strange displacement: The French are preoccupied with culture (How to save their legacy from vulgar Americanization); the English focus on political dilemmas (Should they join the European Monetary Union?); the Germans worry about the sad inertia of their economy.

A desired goal might be a further shift: The English focused on culture (their cultural tolerance and lack of pretence could serve as an antidote to French arrogant elitism and German excessive seriousness). The French focused on economy (which, against all

expectations, theirs has been doing rather well). And—surprise!—Germans on politics (where their recent political life has served as a model of reasonable debate that avoids blind passions).

So far, so good. However, in the second half of *The Free World*, when Ash diagnoses the

The Free World: America, Europe, and the Surprising Future of the West

By Timothy Garton Ash
Random House
304 pages, \$24.95

threats to freedom in the post-Cold War, he becomes dogmatic and simplistic, his proposed solutions hopelessly naïve and declaratory. True, here and there, one finds insights surprising for a man of Ash's political position (like his unambiguous attack on the trade agreements that are pushing the poorer countries toward ruin). Yet his positive proposals lack any foundation in a detailed analysis of the global situation. First, he identifies four "new Red Armies" (sic!) as forces of Evil (or historical processes) that pose or will pose a threat to democracy in the future: 1) the Near East situation (the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the rise of Muslim fundamentalism); 2) the Far East situation (what will China develop into with regard to democracy?); 3) the gap between the rich North and poor South; and 4) the oncoming environmental catastrophe.

Here, Ash simply enumerates four domains that cause worry. Consequently, his proposed solutions read less like a plan for action grounded in serious analysis of the global constellation and more like a list of desiderata (the developed countries should abide by the rules of fair market competition they impose on

the underdeveloped ones; they should make a more serious effort to thwart ecological disaster; only a combined U.S.-E.U. alliance can solve the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, etc.). Indeed, how can one respond to this platitude: "If we want to be able to look ourselves in the face every morning, anyone who earns more than the average wage in a rich country should aim to give 1 percent of his or her annual income to charities with a good track record in the developing world. We can afford it."

The European publishers of *The Free World* chose a far more intriguing subtitle for the book, hinting that Ash would explain: "Why A Crisis Of The West Reveals The Opportunity Of Our Time." But the book fails to live up to the expectations aroused by this subtitle, namely, that the post-Cold War world, though it generates new problems, also could provide a unique chance to confront them. My own perception of these problems is hopelessly tinted by "outmoded" Marxism: The four trouble spots Ash identifies are clearly grounded in the dynamics of today's global capitalism. This link is self-evident in the case of environmental collapse and the North-South poverty gap. As for Islamic fundamentalism, does it not arise through the refusal of Muslim civilization to integrate the social dynamics of capitalism? And doesn't China's strange economic dynamic stem from the fact that it is a Communist state that fully endorses capitalist economy?

The question should therefore be put at a more general level: Where do we stand regarding global capitalism? Are these troubling spots symptoms of a structural flaw inscribed in the very core of the capitalist machine, or are they accidents

that could be kept under control, if not resolved?

This does not mean one should reject Ash's diagnosis and proposals with the crude Marxist retort: "He fails to take into account the dialectical totality of the situation." But Ash would do well to go back and read

Jonathan Alter's column in *Newsweek* written directly following 9/11. After stating that "we can't legalize physical torture; it's contrary to American values," Alter nonetheless concludes that "we'll have to think about transferring some suspects to

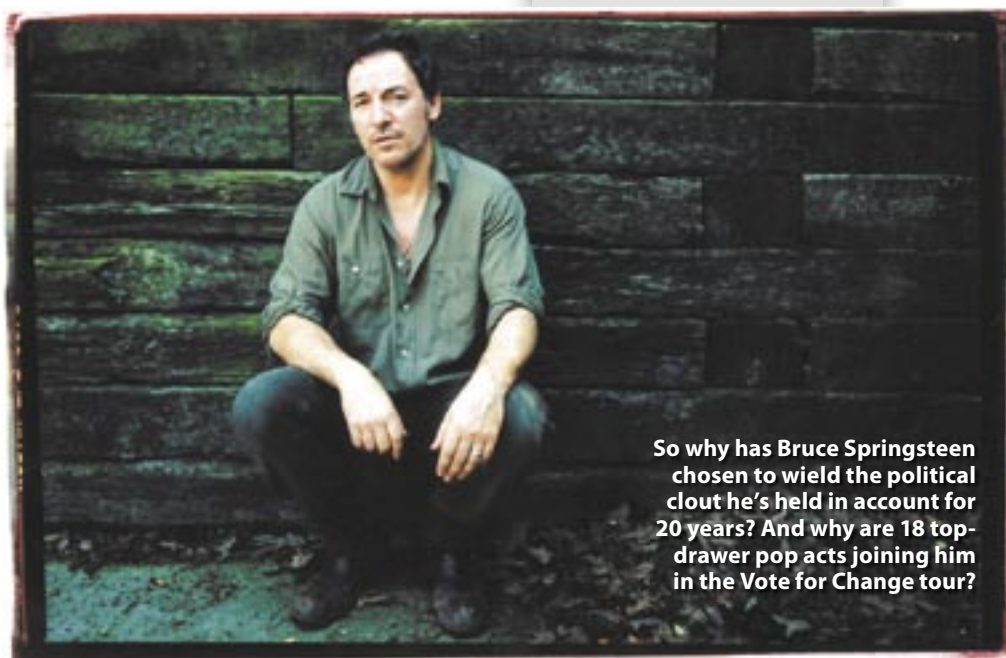
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ART SPACE

REPUBLICAN CONVENTION NY 2004



Cartoonist, caricaturist, artist and iconoclast **Ralph Steadman** (illustrator of choice for Hunter S. Thompson, Kurt Vonnegut, et al.,) fired off this drawing to us during the last days of the 2004 Republican spin-fest in New York "to protest against a scurrilous, impertinent and illegal government administration that was never elected in the first place." He believes, "The majority of good, honest folk in America are completely unaware of what is going on in their name at the heart of their government." See more of Steadman's work and commentary at www.ralphsteadman.com.



So why has Bruce Springsteen chosen to wield the political clout he's held in account for 20 years? And why are 18 top-drawer pop acts joining him in the Vote for Change tour?

BY DAN SARKA

Out of Time

Bruce Springsteen knows a historical crossroads when he sees it. And Republican retiree Alice Cooper thinks you're a moron. Springsteen told an interviewer this summer that he and his band had spent the last 25 years socking away a nest egg of credibility in the

minds of the millions who count themselves among his fans. "There comes a moment when you have to spend some of it," he said. "This is that moment."

Well. We can agree that this is *a* moment. In fact, it's a hell of a moment, one in which failure to act could result in mischief beyond imagining. But "that" moment—when just a little more effort would have rendered *this* moment unnecessary—passed four years ago.

So why has Springsteen finally chosen to wield the political clout he's held in account for 20-plus years? Why are 18 top-drawer pop acts joining together to defeat George Bush now, when the horses clearly

have left the barn? Certainly those whose imaginations failed them in 2000 received a shock, and the hard slap of reality seems to have roused a congenitally dreamy bunch.

Next month's Vote for Change tour, featuring Springsteen, REM, Pearl Jam, Jurassic 5 and 14 other acts, is a brave and intelligent enterprise that likely will mobilize a significant bloc of resistance to George Bush. Over the course of 10 days it will bring 36 shows to more than 30 cities in nine battleground states, focusing serious firepower where it's needed most. And if we learned anything in Florida it's that we mustn't underestimate the significance of even the smallest

shift in voter behavior.

Alice Cooper learned that lesson, too. Last month he said: "If you're listening to a rock star in order to get your information on who to vote for, you're a bigger moron than they are. Why are we rock stars? Because we're morons." This is not the mere ironic muttering of a rich man on a Glendale golf course. It's the voice of a smart Republican who knows firsthand the power of any moron who has the nerve to get up on stage, who fears what these pop stars in opposition to this administration can do. (His friends in the party of Ronald Reagan and Arnold Schwarzenegger also understand the pull of

celebrity, which is why they trotted out their heavyweights like Bo Derek in New York.)

The Vote for Change tour is something of a risky undertaking for Springsteen and the other artists involved. Never mind the Dixie Chicks' crucifixion or the clumsy "Boycott the Boss" campaign mounted by hopeless New York Conservative Party Senate candidate Marilyn O'Grady: It's easy enough to calculate how many red-state fans populist icons like Springsteen, John Mellencamp and John Fogerty stand to lose. To their credit the artists recognize they have more to lose this November than unit sales.

Springsteen is banking on the fact that a rock 'n' roll "moron" with a Telecaster and a sense of desperation can do a world of good. And the moment he faces today is an ice-cold reminder of what can happen when people in his position either underestimate their power or decline to exercise it at all.

The fact is, the Boss had as much rainy-day political capital in 2000 as he has today. He stayed home that year and kept his yap shut.

And so did the rest of us. Most Americans, rock stars and Wal-Mart clerks alike, failed to comprehend the stakes of that election. While a few shuddered to think, most stayed home and hoped for the best.

What a bunch of morons. ■

DAN SARKA, songwriter for Stingray Green (www.stingraygreen.com), writes on music for *In These Times*.

The **Vote for Change** tour is presented by **MoveOn PAC**, with all concert proceeds benefiting the work of **America Coming Together**. The complete schedule and a limited number of presale tickets are available at www.moveonpac.org. Existing MoveOn members also must sign up to be eligible.

BY MICHAEL ATKINSON

Stranger Than Fiction

Seems simple now: Observe as a cabal of Christian billionaires cadges an election and takes over the country, waging war and short-sheeting the citizenry. Put together a nonfiction movie about it. Make \$120 million.

And *Fahrenheit 9/11* hasn't even hit home video, pay-per-view or cable yet. Michael Moore may have benefited from the Bush administration just as that tribe of Reagan-era scrapings has benefited from 9/11, but because of his unprecedented success (for a documentary, and certainly in terms of cost-to-profit ratio), suddenly the American movie theater has become an energized locus of political activism.

Political documentaries are nothing new—produced by the penniless faithful, the films generally have headed for regional film festivals, late-night PBS or, commonly, nowhere at all. Now, thanks to Moore, the nation's urban screens are chockablock with radical anger. As I write, 12 nonfiction dissenting acts of intervention are playing in New York (including Moore's hit, holding for more than two months, and *Control Room*, for more than three-and-a-half)—12 docs, playing simultaneously in one city in the summer, all of them focused furiously on the political present.

Up to eight more films have come and gone and are now hopscotching their way west through the major cities. New films are being unearthed, slapped together or coaxed out

of their caves every week; in the last weeks of August, we've been treated to *Bush's Brain* (a profile on Karl Rove), *Persons of Interest* (about Patriot Act detentions), *Hijacking Catastrophe* (a brisk primer on the whole shebang) and *Outfoxed* (*et tu*, Rupert Murdoch?).

Compare this to just a year ago, or 10 years ago, or 20. The absolute last place any of us would expect to find vital political intercourse would be the multiplex; in roughly the 27 years since *Star Wars*, American movies have become so uniformly odious, childish, bombastic and pandering that the notion of social engagement was something you necessarily left, with your cerebral cortex, at the door. Ordinarily profitable in nickels if at all, documentaries have occupied such a low rung on the ladder that they're barely recognized as film product at all, but rather the indulgent passion of wacko hobbyists barely rescued from the jaws of poverty by increasingly modest NEA checks. Now, thanks to Moore (and Bush), documentaries are cool and profitable as they've never been, not even in the '60s heyday

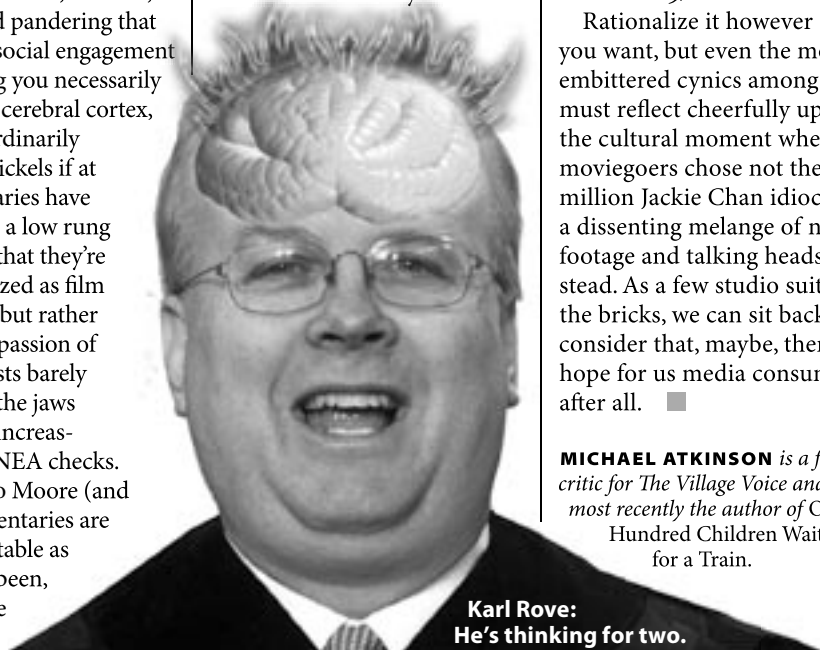
of the *cinéma vérité* movement and the Maysles brothers. Never before has there been a paying doc audience of 17 million or so as there has been for *Fahrenheit*, and so distributors and exhibitors are scrambling to cut a slice of it for themselves.

But there's another, unintentional integer in the equation: Let us not overlook the essential strangeness of having this popular upsurge in radical cinema peak during Hollywood's prize tourist season, when we are not supposed to think. It has been the most bizarre summer the industry has ever

seen—more so, even than the glorious dog days of 1999, when money-burning behemoths like *The Haunting* were taken for a nine-figure ride in a little wooden go-cart called *The Blair Witch Project*. Today, we have a case of cosmic synchronicity—at the same time Bush & Co. are giving pro-am moviemakers all the reason in the world to unbox their digital cameras and document their rage, Hollywood falls on its royal ass. A large majority of the films that were supposed to be dominating our brainwaves from May to September tanked: Spending more than Moore's net on production costs alone, *Around the World in 80 Days* earned back one-fifth of that domestically before evaporating. *The Terminal*, *Collateral* and *Alien vs. Predator* didn't break even (taking post-production and advertising costs into consideration, as one should). *Catwoman*, *The Stepford Wives* and *King Arthur* failed to reap half of what they cost. Big-budget failures outnumbered the winners three to one, ceding screens to indies (*Garden State* and *Napoleon Dynamite* were the luckiest of many benefactors) and documentaries, including *Fahrenheit 9/11*.

Rationalize it however you want, but even the most embittered cynics among us must reflect cheerfully upon the cultural moment when moviegoers chose not the \$120 million Jackie Chan idiocy but a dissenting melange of news footage and talking heads instead. As a few studio suits hit the bricks, we can sit back and consider that, maybe, there's hope for us media consumers after all. ■

MICHAEL ATKINSON is a film critic for *The Village Voice* and most recently the author of *One Hundred Children Waiting for a Train*.



Karl Rove:
He's thinking for two.

Fiction First, Spin Later

Continued from page 21

millions of Americans. And this brazen ignorance of the topic is wildly out-of-step with previous Republican administrations.

"General sex education in schools should begin in the third grade, with AIDS-specific materials introduced in middle school or junior high school," wrote C. Everett Koop, surgeon general during the Reagan administration, "it must include information on heterosexual and homosexual relationships."

For the Bush team, impeding the fight against AIDS stretches beyond America's borders. "There is nothing magical about the way to stop a sexually transmitted killer," Robyn E. Blumner wrote last October in the *St. Petersburg Times*. "Sub-Saharan Africa, home to 30 million of the world's 40 million HIV/AIDS sufferers, is suddenly facing a condom shortage. Family planning clinics from Ethiopia to Swaziland have had their American-donated supplies sharply reduced or cut off; and we can thank our president and his religious right politics for this."

Create homeland insecurity

Bush is starving key programs in homeland security, chopping firefighter funding by a third and community-based law enforcement by 90 percent. The result, in town after town, is understaffing, an increase in the murder rate and less accountability for the crimes.

Writing last year in *Washington Monthly*, Benjamin Wallace-

Wells noted that in Minneapolis, the force was down by 22 percent and crime was up nearly 50 percent in the two years following 9/11. While Richmond, Va., lost 13 percent of its officers and posted double-digit increases in its murder rate in both 2002 and 2003.

Richmond Police Chief Jerry Oliver expressed outrage at Bush's cuts in COPS, or community-oriented policing service. "They don't appear to grasp what we face," he said.

Meanwhile, the risk from homegrown terrorism slips into the fog of official denial. In July, U.S. District Judge James Cohn sentenced Army veteran and fundamentalist Stephen John Jordi to five years in a Florida prison after his arrest last November with plans to bomb progressive churches, abortion clinics and gay bars.

According to Miami reporter Fidel Ortega, Jordi possessed propane tanks, flares, gasoline cans and starter liquids. His goal was a 30- or 40-year terror campaign. But because his plot didn't cross U.S. borders, Jordi didn't fit the definition of terrorist under current federal law.

Control women's bodies

The Bush administration is not content to overturn abortion—here or abroad. It seeks to limit women's access to birth control and education services. In the United States, Bush used regulatory action to quash the so-called morning-after pill—leading to millions of unwanted pregnancies.

But his faith-based regard for pregnancy overseas is becoming an untold crisis. According to Hillary Fyfe, chair of the Family Life Movement of Zambia, who spoke to the *St. Petersburg Times* last year, the administration's push to cut funds for international family planning programs that discuss or provide abortions has left women without a lifeline. "When [young women] fall pregnant, they have no place to go. They take a knitting needle and push it down or they go in the bush and dig up a poisonous root and push it down. Half the time they die."

Tip the scales

Under Bush, the courts have lost their traditional conservative value as an impartial arbiter. In particular, Bush has used court appointments as paybacks to his far-right base and to activate 4 million disaffected fundamentalist voters.

The combination of a federal judiciary closely divided on key questions of policy and philosophy and the extremist positions espoused by Bush nominees can prove explosive. In July, for instance, the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals refused to reconsider *Lofton v. Children and Family Services*. Facing a backlog of children needing homes, the plaintiff questioned the constitutionality of Florida's ban on gay adoptive parents. The law, passed during Anita Bryant's 1977 Save the Children crusade, deprives thousands of otherwise eligible individuals, many already acting as foster parents, the chance of being long-term caregivers. Instead of accepting the case for review by the whole bench, the court avoided a more thorough look at the case, winking and nodding at one of the rankest forms of discrimination still on the books of any state. The vote was 7-6. Bush recess appointee William Pryor cast the deciding vote.

Four years ago, during a different campaign, songwriter Tracy Chapman released an album titled *Telling Stories*. Its title track tackles the case of a chronic fabricator: "There is fiction in the space between you and reality," she sings. That lyric takes on new significance this election year. ■

HANS JOHNSON writes on labor, religion and politics for *In These Times*.

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The Free World

Continued from page 25

our less squeamish allies, even if that's hypocritical. Nobody said this was going to be pretty." This is how First World democracies increasingly function: by outsourcing their dirty work (be it torture or material production) to other countries. Ash is unable to see how the features he condemns (ruthless disregard for the environment, the hypocritical double standards of free trade practices, etc.) are products of the very social dynamic that sustains the First World's role as exporters of democracy and guardians of universal human rights.

It is true one can only be shocked by the excessive indifference toward suffering, even when this suffering is widely reported and condemned in the media. Sudan offers a current example, but recall the three-year-long siege of Sarajevo, when the population was starving and exposed to permanent shelling and sniper fire. The enigma here is why, although the media was continually covering the crisis, was neither the U.N. forces, NATO nor the United States willing to impose a corridor in Sarajevo through which people and provisions could circulate freely? The only answer to this enigma was proposed by Rory Brauman, who, on behalf of the Red Cross, coordinated the help to Sarajevo: The very presentation of the crisis of Sarajevo as "humanitarian," the recasting of a political-military conflict into humanitarian terms, was sustained by a political choice, that of taking the side of Serbia.

Indeed, such a depoliticizing of "Human Rights" too often serves as the ideology of military interventionism in support of specific economic-political purposes. For example, the U.S. overthrow of Saddam Hussein, legitimized in the terms of ending the suffering of the Iraqi people, was clearly not only motivated by economic self-interest (oil), but by the idea that only certain political and economic conditions—Western liberal democracy, guarantee of private property, the inclusion into the global market economy, etc.—could bring freedom to the Iraqi people. In Iraq, the humanitarian anti-politics of only preventing suffering implicitly prohibited a positive collective project for social and political transformation.

What, then, happens to Human Rights when they are reduced to the rights of those excluded from the political process—i.e., when they become useless, since they are the rights of those who, precisely, have no rights? Jacques Ranciere, the French philosopher, recently gave this answer:

They become humanitarian rights, the rights of those who cannot enact them, the victims of the absolute denial of right. For all this, they are not void, Political names and political places never become merely void. The void is filled by somebody or something else. ... If those who suffer inhuman repression are unable to enact Human Rights that are their last recourse, then somebody else has to inherit their rights in order to enact them in their place. This is what is called the "right to humanitarian interference"—a right that some nations assume to the supposed benefit of the victimized populations, and very often against the advice of humanitarian organizations themselves. The "right to humanitarian interference" might be described as a sort of "return to sender:" the disused right that had been sent to the rightless are sent back to the senders.

Thus, in the reigning discourse of humanitarian intervention, the developed West is effectively getting back from the victimized Third World its own message in its true form. This is also where we should look for candidates to fill the position of "universal individual," a particular group whose fate stands for the injustice of today's world: Palestinians, Guantánamo prisoners, etc. Palestine today presents us with the "opportunity" of Ash's subtitle because all of the standard "pragmatic" solutions to the "Middle East crisis" have repeatedly failed, which suggests that a utopian invention of a radical new space may be the only "realistic" choice.

But there is a better example of today's "universal individual": the slum dwellers of the new megalopolises. The explosive growth of slums in the last decades, from Mexico City and other Latin American capitals through Africa to India, China and Indonesia, is perhaps the crucial geopolitical event of our time. Take the case of Lagos, Nigeria. According to Mike Davis, "No one even knows the size of its population—officially it is 6 million, but most experts estimate it at 10 million." Very soon (or perhaps, given the imprecision of Third World censuses, already) the urban population of the earth

will outnumber the rural population. And slum inhabitants will compose the majority of this urban population. So we are in no way dealing with a marginal phenomenon, but rather the fast growth of a population outside state control, living in conditions half outside the law, in terrible need of the minimal forms of self-organization. Slum dwellers—marginalized laborers, superfluous civil servants and ex-peasants—are still incorporated into the global economy in numerous ways, many of them working as informal wage workers or self-employed entrepreneurs, with no adequate health or social security coverage. Slums have mushroomed because of the Third World's inclusion into the global economy. Cheap food imports from the First World have destroyed local agriculture forcing millions to flee the countryside. Their existence is the true "symptom" of slogans like "Development," "Modernization," and "World Market."

While one should resist the temptation to elevate and idealize the slum dwellers into a new revolutionary class, it is extremely surprising how many of their features fit the old Marxist definition of the proletarian revolutionary class. Even more than the classic proletariat, they are "free" in the double meaning of the word—"freed" from all substantial ties *and* dwelling in a free space outside state and police regulations. They are large collectives, forcibly thrown into a situation where they must invent some mode of being-together, while simultaneously deprived of any inherited ethnic and religious traditions.

Slum dwellers are the counter-class to the other newly emerging class, the so-called "symbolic class" (managers, journalists, academics, artists, etc.) that is also uprooted and that perceives itself as directly universal. (A New York academic has more in common with me, a Slovene academic, than with the blacks in Harlem half a mile from his campus.) Is this the new axis of class struggle? Or is the "symbolic class" inherently split, enabling us to make an emancipatory wager on a coalition between the slum dwellers and the "progressives" of the symbolic class?

This brings us back to the title—and underlying project—of Ash's book: Our main hope for a truly "free world" lies in the desolate universe of the slums. We should be watching the slum collectives for signs of new forms of social awareness: They will be the seeds of the future. ■

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Deserter

Continued from back page

titude test. Ironically, the unit was known locally as Air Canada because it offered all the benefits of a flight north of the border, without the weather and legal problems. To make doubly sure, he ticked the box saying “No” to overseas service.

In 1972, he went to Alabama and in effect did the same as firing a shotgun next to his ear. After several years of highly expensive flight training, he “failed to accomplish” his flight medical exam, grounding himself as a pilot.

Of course, hundreds of thousands of young men were trying to get out of Vietnam. But Bush then Younger was different. He not only supported the war, he actively campaigned for political candidates who supported it as well. As with Dick Cheney, he had “other priorities.” In fact, Bush’s career is an eloquent depiction of the power that class wields in American society—and the power the class system’s beneficiaries use to delude people into believing it does not exist.

As Colin Powell said in his memoirs—before joining Bush’s cabinet—“I can never forgive a leadership that said, in effect: ‘These young men—poor, less educated, less privileged—are expendable (someone described them as ‘economic cannon fodder’), but the rest are too good to risk.’”

Powell added, presciently and inconveniently, “I am angry that so many of the sons of the powerful and well placed ... managed to wrangle slots in Reserve and National Guard units. Of the many tragedies of Vietnam, this raw class discrimination strikes me as the most damaging to the ideal that all Americans are created equal and owe equal allegiance to their country.”

We have now surpassed 1,000 American casualties in Iraq, and Powell’s complaint is even more true. Only eight out of 535 legislators in Washington have children in the military. Half the garrison over in Iraq are members of the National Guard who did not get the option to refuse service overseas.

And while Bush failed to turn up for duty in Alabama (he was campaigning for a Republican candidate), other Guardsmen who did not report were dragooned off for active duty in Vietnam. But the congressman’s son was covered, and the records disappeared for decades.

The scion of East Coast WASP plutocrats who passes himself with some success as a Texan cowboy and self-made businessman is a draft evader and deserter who parades as a veteran and commander in chief. And in this Bush benefited from the best affirmative action program there is: money.

In Texas, they may call “walking” “swaggering,” but they do know when someone actually walks

the walk. When he squirmed his way out of his Guard service early, the University of Texas Law School turned down young Bush because of low grades. He had to go to Harvard, where the family money could provide the raw class discrimination that Powell used to get indignant about.

He has evaded and lied his way through life since. In the public eye he has presented himself as a self-made entrepreneur when at each stage of his life he has been wrapped in the cocoon of the local Texan establishment and his family’s WASP hives in the Skull & Bones and similar covens. They have been there to pick him up when he fell, which was often, and to cover for him when he erred, which was frequently.

His most dangerous charade is his current one. A government controlled by militarists is in some ways more dangerous than one controlled by the military. Since 9/11, Bush has wrapped himself in the flag. He continually refers to himself as “commander-in-chief,” and dresses up, whenever he can, in quasi-uniform. Indeed, he prefers to speak to handpicked military audiences, not the to unruly citizenry off base.

It is a continuation of the same role he had at his Andover prep school—cheerleader for the football team in which his job was to wear funny costumes and lead an appreciative crowd in shared chanting. More sinisterly, you have to look to Fidel Castro or Saddam Hussein to see someone with a similar appreciation for military tailoring and martial backdrops.

After looking closely at his record and behavior, I still don’t know whether what we are seeing is dangerous self-delusion or rampant hypocrisy—or some more perilous combination of the two. One can see why he thinks the Almighty is on his side—so much of the concrete documentation of his sleazy behavior in the Guard seems to have disappeared into oblivion. And who could fail to see God’s hand at work in the way the easily rebuttable lies of the Swift Boat Veterans have been aired incessantly while the irrefutable facts of Bush’s hypocrisy go without mention?

Whatever the editors and producers think, the facts of Bush’s service evasion are important because he has never apologized, nor has he changed. As his pseudo-autobiography puts it, his slogan is “Faith, Family and Friends.” His rich family and friends have indeed been faithful to him, and he has returned their favors a hundred-fold.

And meanwhile more than 1,000 Americans and perhaps 20 times that many Iraqis have died. ■

IAN WILLIAMS is the author of *Deserter: Bush’s War on Military Families, Veterans and His Past*, now available from Nation Books.

Deserter at the Helm! By Ian Williams



TERRY LABAN

ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, I LIVED IN downtown Manhattan near the World Trade Center. After I heard the bang, I was stuck on the phone for several hours reporting from my fire escape for CBC and BBC. And then, as soon as I could, I headed toward the towers, zigzagging round lower Manhattan to evade the police lines and get as close as possible.

Lots of reporters were behaving in similar ways, and so were thousands of citizens who wanted to help, from ironworkers to doctors, nurses to firemen. And where was George W. Bush? He was zigzagging across North America on Air Force One, trying to stay away from any potential targets. Satellite pictures show it clearly. With all other flights grounded, his contrails left a meta-

phorical yellow streak across the continent. And now, we are invited to vote for him for his steadfastness in the face of terror and because he is a resolute Commander-in-Chief in the war against it.

But in reality he is the leader who pulled the troops from the hunt for Osama bin Laden, the self-proclaimed perpetrator of September 11, and sent U.S. and allied armies after Saddam Hussein, who is indeed guilty of many things but is indubitably innocent of any involvement in the World Trade Center attacks.

At the Republican National Convention in New York, Bush was compared to Churchill and to FDR—as if the war leaders in 1945 suddenly called off the war in Germany, leaving Hitler running

free in the Bavarian Alps, and sent the Allied Forces chasing after Juan Peron in Argentina.

This should come as no surprise to anyone who has looked at the military record of George W. Bush. With a candor that has since disappeared, he told the *Houston Chronicle* in 1994: “I was not prepared to shoot my eardrum out with a shotgun in order to get a deferment. Nor was I willing to go to Canada. So I chose to better myself by learning how to fly airplanes.”

At the height of the Tet Offensive, when American troops were up against the wall, when the Viet Cong had taken Hue and the American Embassy in Saigon, Bush Clan clout got him into the Texas Air National Guard, despite lousy scores on his pilot ap-